

COTURRI, GIANINA MARIE, M.A. Georgic Rest and Pastoral Labor: John Clare's Environmentalism. (2015)
Directed by Dr. Anne Wallace. 52 pp.

Although John Clare, a Romantic era poet, has been lauded as one of the earliest environmental poets, few scholars have identified the specifics of his environmental argument. Clare's position seems obscure not only because his position shifts but also because he draws heavily on pastoral and georgic literature to craft his environmental claims. Clare's complex transformations of georgic and pastoral themes reveal his desire to form what I call a *mingled community*, one that strives to include humans and non-human nature.

Much Clare criticism has examined the same poems, particularly his political poem, "The Mores." My work analyzes this poem but, to create a larger poetic context, I will also examine "Proposals for Building a Cottage" and "The Cottager." The former text evokes georgic poetry, but resembles a pastoral; in contrast, "The Cottager" clearly adheres to georgic poetry, while still utilizing various pastoral elements. The complex relationship these poems have with classical poetry help illuminate "The Mores."

Although this poem seems less related to typical pastoral and georgic tropes, its subtle connections embody Clare's environmental argument. After examining "The Mores," which depicts wild nature alongside a human community, I will explore Clare's badger poems. These poems illustrate the mingled community that Clare wishes to build between the natural environment and humans, and establishes his status as an environmental poet.

COTURRI, GIANINA MARIE, M.A. "Fled for Shelter to a Heart of Nature": Gender and the Environment in Mary Wilkins Freeman's *Six Trees*. (2015)
Directed by Dr. Karen L. Kilcup. 57 pp.

In 1903, Mary Wilkins Freeman published a volume of short stories, *Six Trees* (1903), all of which feature a transformative experience. Freeman inflects all the stories with a strong environmental argument informed by gender that makes her much more of an environmental writer than most scholars have acknowledged. Each story demonstrates that people need a connection to nature, whether it is a great pine in the middle of the wilderness or an ornamental poplar in the front yard. Without this connection, people forget not only nature's inherent significance but also its ability to promote spiritual enlightenment. Freeman asks her readers to replace outdated, anthropocentric religious models with a more inclusive spirituality that incorporates the environment and emphasizes relationships between humanity and the nonhuman world.

I will show how each story contributes to Freeman's ecofeminist argument. Throughout the collection, the illustrations form a meta-text that complicates and sometimes undermines the narrative. The interaction between the text and the illustrations indicate why Freeman's ecofeminism has been neglected. Ultimately, my analysis of *Six Trees* will demonstrate Freeman's importance to the environmental canon and early ecofeminism.

GEORGIC REST AND PASTORAL LABOR: JOHN CLARE'S
ENVIRONMENTALISM
AND
"FLED FOR SHELTER TO A HEART OF NATURE": GENDER AND
THE ENVIRONMENT IN MARY WILKINS
FREEMAN'S *SIX TREES*

by

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GEORGIC REST AND PASTORAL LABOR:
JOHN CLARE'S ENVIRONMENTALISM

In 1994, Hugh Haughton and Adam Phillips published an essay collection to celebrate John Clare's 200th birthday and to demonstrate the poet's depth and versatility. The essays examine Clare's reception, his politics, his experiences with mental illness, and his treatment of botany, as well as how he connects poetry and natural history and how he serves as a model for post-colonial poets (Haughton, Phillips, and Summerfield 22). These topics represented cutting-edge scholarship. The volume, however, neglects Clare's environmentalism. Haughton and Phillips' introduction acknowledges that the poet "still poses unresolved problems for criticism, even for critics who are most attentive to the issues which Clare is negotiating in his verse," which includes "questions about ecology and the ruinous exploitation of the natural world" (Haughton, Phillips, and Summerfield 14).

I understand why critics have neglected Clare's environmental argument. Clare's position seems obscure because it shifts and because he utilizes classic tropes to ground his argument. Clare draws heavily on pastoral and georgic literature to craft his environmental claims. There is no evidence that Clare ever examined Virgil's *Eclogues* or *Georgics*, but we do know that he owned and read James Thomson's *The Seasons*, a contemporary georgic (Bate 89-90). Thomson's 1726 edition reveals that Virgil's *Georgics* inspired his poem:

It was this Devotion to the Works of Nature that, in his Georgicks, inspired the rural Virgil to write so inimitably; and who can forbear joining with him in this Declaration of his, which has been the Rapture of Ages. (Zippel 242)

However, critics do not widely recognize that Virgil's *Georgics* inspired Thomson. For example, Terry Gifford calls *The Seasons* "the complete pastoral," one that idealizes "the country and the city, the managed agricultural land and the wastes, British countryside and the African savannah" (47), but does not acknowledge that Thomson considered *The Seasons* a georgic poem. Because distinguishing between georgic and pastoral poetry is difficult,¹ I will use Virgil, rather than Clare's contemporaries, to contextualize how he uses these classic tropes to argue that readers should form what I call a *mingled community*, which integrates humans and non-human nature.

Clare's environmental community involves the entire non-human world but only specific pieces of the human world. His ideal community contains only responsible people. He particularly excludes industrialized urbanites who have no established connection to nature. Furthermore, Clare wishes to discount rural residents who view the natural environment materialistically. In all, only people who see nature as Clare views it may enter his idealized community. The poet's exclusiveness further complicates his already difficult environmental stance, but his elitism has precedent. We need to study Clare's intricate, unstable, and misanthropic environmental argument because critics have primarily focused on *how* he constructs it, rather than analyzing the argument itself.

¹ Poets and critics alike conflate georgic and pastoral poetry. Anthony Low argues that "the great enemy of the georgic spirit was the courtly or aristocratic ideal...The absence of the georgic was a function of a fundamental contempt for labor, especially manual and agricultural labor, on the part of England's leaders" (5). Low and John Murdoch both elucidate the georgic's disappearance.

Furthermore, Clare's mingled community helps us to better understand environmentalism's roots and environmental justice's beginnings. Clare has been consistently connected to these two movements, though few have established his specific environmental demands. Analyzing how Clare constructs his message is particularly important because it will help us understand his lesser-known poems.

Much Clare criticism has examined the same poems, particularly his political poem, "The Mores." My work evaluates this poem but, to create a larger poetic context, I will also scrutinize "Proposals for Building a Cottage" and "The Cottager." The former text evokes georgic poetry, but resembles a pastoral, a poetic feat that reveals Clare's environmental argument. While assessing this poem, I will also briefly discuss enclosure, a political issue that influenced Clare's poetry. I will then consider "The Cottager," which clearly adheres to georgic poetry, while still utilizing various pastoral themes. Stressing its georgic undertones highlights Clare's environmental argument. Though these two poems depict human-built environments, they still display the mingled community Clare wishes to build.

The complex relationship these poems have with classical poetry helps illuminate "The Mores." Although this poem seems less related to typical pastoral and georgic tropes, its subtle connections embody his environmental argument. After examining "The Mores," which depicts wild nature alongside a human community, I explore Clare's badger poems. The first, set beyond the village's environs, displays a uniquely wild perspective. The second concerns a domesticated badger, which allows me to conclude within an anthropocentric community, where I began. Coupling these poems uncovers

Clare's politically-engaged environmental argument, showing their elusive connections to georgic and pastoral poetry. This poetic circle helps map the singular community Clare wishes to build between the natural environment and humans.² My conclusion summarizes Clare's environmental argument and establishes his status as an environmental poet.

Contextualizing Clare Studies

Critics study a variety of topics associated with Clare. Some contrast him and his contemporaries. Adam White examines not only the poet's debt to Robert Burns but also Lord Byron's looming presence. Sara Lodge connects Clare and Keats (who was also published by Clare's publisher, John Taylor [Paulin xxi]). Others scrutinize specific details. For instance, Sarah Houghton-Walker discusses how he depicts gypsies, while John Goodridge considers his home community.

James McKusick is among the few have considered Clare's environmental message. McKusick writes that "Clare's poetry engages ecological issues with an intensity and breadth of vision that is largely unprecedented in the Western tradition of nature-writing" (227). Clare combines "a deep sensitivity for natural phenomena with forceful environmental advocacy[, which] clearly entitles him be regarded as the first ecological writer in the English literary tradition" (McKusick 227). To McKusick, "Clare's intense engagement with the natural world, his respect for the local environment as an autonomous realm, and his projection of his experience in a mode of presentation

² I have omitted Clare's so-called "Asylum Poems" because they focus most explicitly on aesthetics. His earlier poetry, conversely, emphasizes his surroundings and his activities.

that elides chronological difference enable his deep insight into the interdependence of all living things,” but McKusick does not develop this idea enough (236). He concludes by arguing for Clare’s strong non-anthropocentric position:

Clare's ecological vision is confirmed by his powerful and moving poems in defence of the local environment. He does not base his arguments on economic utility or aesthetic pleasure, but speaks directly for the earth and its creatures, attributing intrinsic value to all the flora and fauna that constitute the local ecosystem...He defends the right of individual birds, animals, insects, flowers, and trees to exist and propagate...As an environmental advocate, Clare is virtually unprecedented in the extent of his insight into the complex relation between ecological devastation and social injustice. (239)

McKusick subordinates community to environmental injustice, which emphasizes humanity. While I echo McKusick's argument, I want not only to utilize different poems, but also to establish Clare’s mingled community.

David Tagnani presents a strong counterargument to Clare's placement as an environmental poet, contending that while the poet avoids “anthropocentrism by discovering the merits of a plant that has been disdained as a weed,” he “perpetuates anthropocentrism by suggesting that the plant has value insomuch as it shares in the condition of the poem's speaker” (Tagnani 34). Tagnani acknowledges that he has examined only one Clare poem, stating that “this is, in some ways, a narrow and rather mean-spirited ecocritical reading” (37) but still he refuses to call Clare environmental.

Tagnani's essay acknowledges Clare's complex environmental argument while still highlighting his inconsistencies. However, I concur with Astrid Bracke, who argues that ecocritics must be willing to accept pieces that do not make typical or cohesive environmental arguments: “A mature ecocritical practice should not dismiss images or

texts for not being environmentally sound. Instead, it needs to question what such problematic texts reveal about our experience and perceptions of the (natural) environment” (766). Clare is not always ecocentric, though I have selected poems that showcase his environmentalism. Yet Tagnani's essay reminds us that developing Clare's environmental argument requires that we examine a broad swath of his work, as I will do here.

Georgic Leisure: “Proposals for Building a Cottage”

“Proposals for Building a Cottage” details the speaker's perfect home. The speaker describes every particular: the yard’s layout, the roof’s construction, and the cottage’s interior organization. Strikingly odd because of its mundane practicality, “Proposals for Building a Cottage” deserves more attention. Identifying the poem’s pastoral and georgic tropes, and establishing its relationship to enclosure, simplifies its ambiguities and reveals its political stance.

The poem omits a clear sense of responsibility. The speaker describes the perfect cottage but never reveals who will build it or why anyone would gift one, as he eventually proposes. Only willing to contribute minimal work—“Along the floor some sand” he will “sift / To make it fit to live in” (“Proposals” 33-34)—the speaker steadfastly refuses to donate any resources, financial or physical, to create the structure. Unable or unwilling to acknowledge who is responsible for the building, he does promise that he will “thank ye for the gift / As something worth the giving” (“Proposals” 35-36). What, then, makes the cottage such a particularly worthwhile gift? And, perhaps more

importantly, how can a poem describing a building's design be considered environmental?

The georgic tone helps explain the cottage's worthiness. The poem's direct, didactic, and commanding tone match a traditional georgic. The *Georgics* are prescriptive, describing, minutely, an ideal farm's layout. Virgil's tone suggests that he knows precisely what should be done and how to do it to best effect:

So, if the soil of the field you're getting ready
Is rich and fertile, set your oxen to work
In early spring to turn the earth, and then
Let it lie waiting for the summer's heat to bake it,
So as to keep the weeds from flourishing
And interfering with the joyous grain...(Georgics 7)

His advice and demands will help farmers make better farms—farms that benefit the farmer while also complementing nature. Virgil's tone balances advice and imperiousness. Obviously he has excellent advice—he carefully explains why each action should be taken—but he also brooks no argument. He feels he knows best.

“Proposals for Building a Cottage” uses the same tone. The speaker feels his design is perceptibly the best. The speaker demands that the cottage be placed “[b]eside a runnel” with “broad oaks oer its chimley spread” and that “grass plats grace the door” (“Proposals” 1-4). To guarantee the cottage's value, the speaker commands where exactly this building should be placed and begins to describe how everything around it should look, which assures that his creation will be properly placed and, notably, that it will accommodate the natural community. His tone, however, lacks Virgil's implicit criticism of idleness and leisure.

Despite similar settings and characters, georgic and pastoral values differ greatly.

Virgil's denigration of leisure distinguishes georgic poetry:

When the cold rains come and they have to stay indoors,
The laborers are able to get things done
That in better weather they'd have to hurry to do...
There are many tasks that are right and proper to do,
No matter whether or not it's a holiday. (*Georgics* 23)

Virgil indicates that when leisure time does appear, a farmer ought to find a project. A worthwhile farm cannot afford a farmer who takes breaks or avoids his work.

Virgil's pastoral poetry portray leisure much differently. "Eclogue VII" features a laborer willingly putting aside his work to enjoy singing. Meliboeus remarks that his "billy goat, the boss man of [his] flock / Had wandered away somewhere, away from the others," but Daphnis tells him to ignore this trouble and come relax. Meliboeus agrees:

I thought, why not? I have no Phyllis at home
And no Alcippe to care for the just-weaned lambs,
But Corydon and Thyrsis in a contest
Is a contest not to miss. I thought, this game
Takes precedence over work, and so I stayed. (Virgil, *Eclogues* 53)

Virgil suggests that socializing is a harried farmer's only escape. Pleasures are few and the work is hard. Indeed, even while relaxing, farmers cannot forget that work remains. Farmland or grazing-land frequently hosts this socializing, a constant reminder of what is left undone, but Virgil minimizes the actual work while elevating leisure.

"Proposals for Building a Cottage" manages to combine these two opposing tendencies. While the speaker's voice mirrors a georgic, the content values leisure,

creating tension. We never learn the speaker's occupation and the only work he mentions is sifting sand over the finished cottage's floor. Rather than describing work, the speaker outlines his leisure habits. For instance, he remarks that "I love the sparrows ways to watch / Upon the cotters sheds" ("Proposals" 21-22). "Proposals for Building a Cottage" describes a cottage that will solely entertain an idle farmer. Given the quite striking georgic tone, emphasizing leisure may seem counterintuitive. However, including this common pastoral trope communicates Clare's environmental argument. The perfect cottage does not help its occupant work harder or better. Instead, the natural community, represented by the sparrows, envelops the perfect cottage, helping the occupant become a better community member. Rather than estranging the speaker from the natural world, the perfect cottage brings him closer to it. However, the speaker's dream is not safe; the poem's middle portion suggests potential dangers.

The *Eclogues* also strike a warning note. The collection's first poem details the consequences of land theft. Meliboeus's land has been taken and he laments his removal to his neighbor Tityrus, who can relax beneath the trees, while Meliboeus "must leave [his] native place," his home, the fields he loves, "and go elsewhere" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 3). He hopes that he will "Come back, after many years, to look upon / The turf roof of what had been [his] cottage / And the little field of grain that once was [his], / [His] own little kingdom" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 9), but he has no expectations. Meliboeus, banished to some far off, unknown land (Virgil, *Eclogues* 9), will no doubt die far from home. Meliboeus's lament, which mourns his lost home and livelihood, highlights agricultural displacement's troubling aspects. He will move somewhere entirely unknown, which

worries him because he will not know how to properly cultivate a different environment. His ignorance will garner uncertain, if not catastrophic, results. Virgil's dire depiction of removal implicitly criticizes why Meliboeus must leave.

Distant political machinations force Meliboeus to leave his ancestral land; it has been taken so "it could be given to Octavian's veterans" (Ferry, "Introduction," *Eclogues* xi). Meliboeus and Virgil denounce the political system that has forced the farmer's displacement:

Have we done all this work [asks Meliboeus]
Upon our planted and fallow fields so that
Some godless barbarous soldier will enjoy it?
This is what civil war has brought down upon us.
So Meliboeus, carefully set out
Your plants and pear trees, all in rows—for whom?
For strangers, for others, we have farmed our land. (Virgil, *Eclogues* 9)

The person who will take over Meliboeus's judiciously tended farm is not a local; he is "godless" and "barbarous," unworthy of Meliboeus's blessed land. Furthermore, this usurper is a "soldier," with little farming experience. Virgil underscores that locals who are deeply connected to the land should be responsible for farming. Farming requires devoted, indigenous people; it is too important to be just anyone's responsibility. Virgil's skepticism of non-locals allows us to re-examine Clare's misanthropy.

Because the speaker details a perfect—and therefore quite desirable—cottage, mistrusting his neighbors comes as no surprise. The second stanza introduces this mistrust, when the speaker requests a secure door:

The door may open wi a string
So that it closes tight
And locks too would be wanted things
To keep out thieves at night (Clare, “Proposals” 5-8)

Other than these possible thieves, the poem mentions no other humans, which divides the speaker and human society. The cottage does not contain any objects worth stealing. The speaker’s only enumerated possessions are books (Clare, “Proposals” 32), but he lavishly describes the cottage’s outside and how the human structure will accommodate the natural world. Clare emphasizes a non-anthropocentric community. Indeed, he desires to live amidst local flora and fauna, not other people.

Contextualizing Clare’s poem reveals that the speaker’s possessions are not the primary target, affirming the poet’s political and environmental stance. Humans, especially distant city dwellers, are not to be trusted because they do not consider the non-human world when they build. Urban detachment encourages such policies as enclosure, which, before and during Clare’s time, was among the most unnatural land organization methods. “Proposals for Building a Cottage” subtly evokes enclosure to demonstrate how it has hurt rural farmers and communities.

Enclosure’s start preceded Clare but expanded exponentially due to economic reasons during his lifetime. England was experiencing “a depressed rural economy” and “people were saying that something had to be done about the state of British agriculture” (Bate 15). This depression meant more advanced machinery—for instance, a “drill-plough which would reduce the necessity for superfluous men and horses” (Bate 15)—

and more efficient land use. Jonathan Bate writes that in 1793 the government began the process that led to Helpstone's enclosure:

[The national Board of Agriculture's] remit was announced...: inquire into the ownership of land, the state of the soil, livestock, crops and their rotation, the use of ploughs and other machines. To ask 'What advantages have been found to result from inclosing land in regard to the increase of rent,—quantity or quality of produce,—improvement of stock, etc.' To gather information regarding the size and nature of enclosures, their effect on population and on common lands. The rate of agricultural labour. The extent of wastelands and the upkeep of woodlands. The condition of roads and farmhouses. (16)

This research agenda favors monetary exploitation, while also demonstrating the government's feeble environmental awareness. Facts and figures, not impressions and memories, dominate this description. However, this bureaucratic work's full ramifications took several more years to be felt in Clare's hometown.

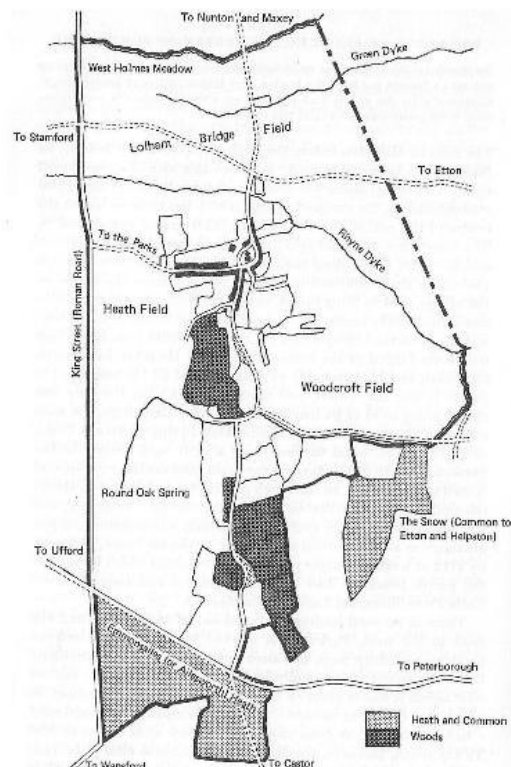
Enclosure encourages people to reconsider their relationship to the environment, with dramatic consequences. Enclosure was a "private Act of Parliament" that authorized the privatization "of common land in some particular locality" ("Enclosure"). Bate cites the parliamentary act that enclosed the land surrounding Clare's childhood home:

[S]ome Parts of the said Arable, Meadow, and Pasture lands are intermixed, and otherwise inconveniently situated for the respective Owners and Occupiers thereof, and the said Commons and Waste Grounds yield but little Profit, and in their present State are incapable of any considerable Improvement, and it would be very advantageous if the said Arable, Meadow, and Pasture Lands, and also the said Commons and Waste Grounds, were divided and inclosed, and in specific Shares thereof allotted to the several Persons interested therein, in proportion and according to their respective Estates, Rights, and Interests[.] (qtd. in Bate 46-47)

Ostensibly motivated by convenience, this act aims to help powerful landowners, not powerless agricultural workers. It does not consider how enclosure will affect people who need the commons to survive. Much as Octavian's edicts gave the "godless barbarous" people Meliboeus's land, the people who obtain the "Commons and Waste Grounds" likely will not know the land well nor desire to work the land responsibly. Furthermore, the act ignores the delicate, non-monetized relationship between humans and nature. Commodifying nature encourages capitalistic modes of thinking; the land's worth becomes economic, rather than intrinsic. Furthermore, the government's attempts to make life more convenient and efficient alters the landscape. Indeed, we can consider the government's actions theft, which explains the thievery that Clare's speaker fears.

Altering the landscape for economic purposes augurs a deepening alienation between humans and the environment. McKusick argues that enclosure wanted to "enhance the productivity of agriculture by providing an incentive for individual farmers to exploit their newly consolidated plots with maximum efficiency" (226). Industrialization and enclosure were a pair, though enclosure predated industrialization. Industrial farming requires efficient land organization; enclosure meant more efficient farming.

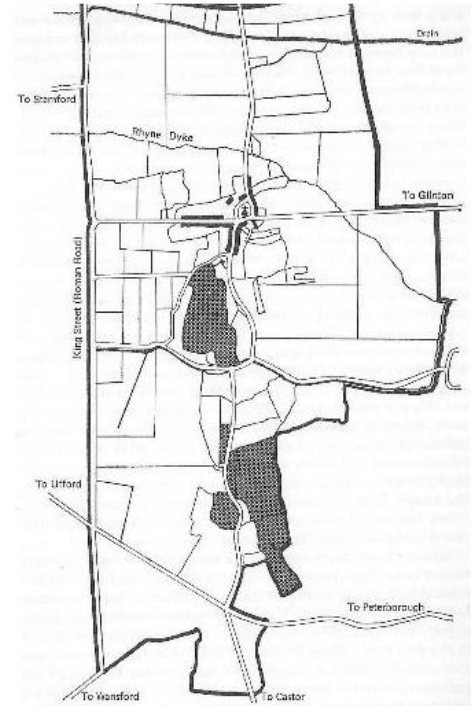
Figure 1. Pre-enclosure Helpston (Barrell 102)



Those who emphasized efficiency ignored natural features or traditional byways, which meant that many natural landmarks, paths, and features were lost or irreparably damaged. John Barrell's maps of pre-enclosure (Figure 1) and post-enclosure (Figure 2) Helpston help illustrate how life changed. The commons "fostered a sense of community" because "the fields spread out in a wheel with the village at its hub" (Paulin xix). Figure 1 shows this organization, illustrating how land division originally followed irregular lines.

Figure 2 shows how enclosure erased this circular layout and imposed a relatively square one. Bate writes that once Helpston's enclosure was complete, "the ownership of every acre, rood and perch, the position of every road, footway and public drain" had been enumerated. More importantly, "[f]ences, gates and No Trespassing signs went up. Trees came down. Streams were stopped in their course so that the line of ditches could be made straight" (Bate 48). Enclosure did not use natural lines to map the new and obtrusive fences; instead, it willfully ignored the natural landscape while making it more linear. John Felstiner argues that enclosure "politically as well as personally threatened" Clare, suggesting enclosure's significant destructiveness (62). This personal threat cannot be overstated, for it affected not only what Clare wrote, but also how he wrote.

Figure 2. Post-enclosure Helpston (Barrell 107)



Clare's reaction to this political issue situates him as an early environmental poet. The poet transforms his threatened feelings into "a desperate and compelling plea for sustainable open-field agriculture, old-style communal village life, and the preservation of 'waste' lands" (McKusick 239). Clare connected industrial farming and environmental degradation. Industrial farming may allow certain farmers to plant more and become economic powerhouses; industrial farming, however, destroys most farmers, leaving them landless, penniless, and rootless. E.P. Thompson argues that Clare primarily concerns himself with "the new instrumental and exploitative stance, not only towards labour...but also towards the natural world" (180). Thompson contends that "Clare can be described, without hindsight, as a poet of ecological protest: he was not writing about man here and nature there, but lamenting a threatened equilibrium in which both were involved" (181). Though Thompson connects humans and nature and he even asserts that enclosure harms humans and animals equally, he, like McKusick, employs generalities that seem inapplicable to Clare's seeming apolitical and non-environmental poems. Contextualizing these poems with Virgil's classic tropes clarifies Clare's environmental stance.

"Proposals for Building a Cottage" displays Clare's ability to make mundane details political. Directly following his mistrustful statements, the speaker requests a garden in a remarkably claustrophobic stanza that evokes enclosure not through direct reference but through imagery. The speaker first requests "A little garden not too fine / Inclosed wi painted pails" ("Proposals" 9-10). Clare emphasizes the garden's compression by "inclosing" it with pails. The editor glosses "pails" as a variant of "pale"

and defines it as “enclosed land” (Robinson 513). Enclosure and “pale” have much else in common.³ Originally, “pale” referenced a “pointed piece of wood intended to be driven into the ground, esp. as used with others to form a fence;” however, the word came to mean an “area enclosed by a fence” or, indeed, “any enclosed place.” Furthermore, pale can mean a “district or territory within determined bounds, or subject to a particular jurisdiction.” The political connotations of Clare’s diction are clear, given enclosure’s presence. The speaker wishes to “enclose” his own little garden—a move that might keep it safe. Fences, paradoxically, signal the speaker’s power. If he fences his plot, perhaps it will remain “subject to [his] particular jurisdiction.” By emphasizing “inclosed,” he criticizes the policy that destroyed the common land. The Acts of Enclosure constricted the poor, limiting their opportunities. Clare, however, undermines the speaker’s ownership by highlighting restriction as he describes the cottage. His description reveals the speaker’s extreme restriction, which mirrors how the rural poor live. The speaker also requests “wood vines round the cot to twine / Pind to the wall with nails” (“Proposals” 11-12). Clare constrains and pinches the entire house, not just the garden, which emulates the rural poor’s confinement, demonstrating enclosure’s thoroughness. Not even personal gardens can escape enclosure’s effects.

However, Clare’s representation undermines his environmental argument. He equates the plants that surround the house and enclosure, making a contradictory statement about the relationship between nature and enclosure. Typically, the poet describes enclosure in fiercely unnatural terms; conflating plants and enclosure is

³ My discussion of the word “pale” draws on the *OED* entry for the word.

therefore particularly unsettling. While other contexts would make this image seem cozy, here it becomes almost ominous. For the first time in the poem, mingling human and nonhuman troubles Clare. The poet usually derides the human belief that fences can confine nature because he believes that humans and nature ought to form an equal community. Here, however, he presents the opposing argument: he equates enclosure and plants' natural twining, while showing that fences are good because they represent the attempt to reassert individual farmers' authority.

Clare's anthropomorphizing weakens his environmental argument, but rather than allowing a single stanza to undermine the poem's overall environmentalism, we must remember his larger message: the natural world absorbs the perfect cottage. Plants climb over it as easily as they might climb any other obstacle. Despite the stanza's anthropocentric overtones, Clare's overall argument remains clear. Enclosure may constrict the perfect cottage, but, if it properly includes the natural community, it can still achieve perfection. Furthermore, this is a pastoral moment. Defeating enclosure is impossible—it cannot be stopped or solved. If the speaker learns how to exist within the new system, however, he can resume his stabilizing work. This moment both supports and undermines Clare's environmental argument, allowing us to better understand Clare's environmentalism as emergent rather than completed.

Clare's environmental argument only appears through the relationship he develops between humans and nature, a relationship that owes much to Virgil's work. Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* highlight communities that involve both humans and nature, rather than humans imposing their will. The second *Georgic* highlights this theme

when it explains how to select the proper place for trees, vines, and other crops. Virgil does not recommend planting wherever, but instead studying the land and choosing the proper place:

But first you have to decide whether it's better
To plant your vines on hills or the level plain.
If the ground is level, plant them close together;
Bacchus is not less generous when they're planted
Closely in that fashion. But if the ground's hilly,
Terraced or sloping upward, set them out widely. (*Georgics* 69)

Planting “so the paths between them are always the same” “so the soil may give its strength to all / The vines in equal measure and their branches / Freely extend themselves upon the air” shows the benefits of studying the land (Virgil, *Georgic* 69-71). A farmer should observe the land and plant accordingly, which will ensure a better crop and a flourishing farm. Virgil envisions farms that respect the local ecosystem, but still prioritize human needs.

Clare, however, goes further. His version emerges best when he describes birds’ needs. The speaker wants to watch the sparrows, so he asks the builder to “here and there pull out the thatch / As they may hid[e] their heads” (“Proposals” 23-24). Willing to damage his roof’s integrity for birds, the speaker minimizes humanity. He wants to balance nature and humanity, proving his commitment to this balance when he demands that the builders “[l]eave holes within the chimney top” so the “sweeping swallows” can “paste their nest between” (“Proposals” 27, 25, 28). The ideal cottage does not have the finest chimney; instead, it has a humble one that birds find attractive. These lines do not

register the speaker's own needs. The speaker wants his house to have a place for the birds, further demonstrating that he desires to coexist with, rather than combat, nature.

However, birds are not Clare's only interest. The speaker also requires space for plants:

Let hazels grow and spindling sedge
Bent bowring over head
Dig old mans beard from woodland hedge
To twine a summer shade

Beside the threshold sods provide
And build a summer seat
Plant sweet briar bushes by its side
And flowers that smelleth sweet (Clare, "Proposals" 13-20)

The speaker integrates plants and buildings. Nature, birds and plants alike, surrounds the cottage. His vision, nevertheless, contains some complicated environmental ramifications. The speaker wishes to encourage certain, specific plants; he transplants old man's beard, removing it from its natural habitat to bring it closer to his home. Moving nature for personal convenience appears incompatible with Clare's idyllic mingled community. How can arbitrarily transplanting a plant be considered environmental?

Rather than desiring pristine nature or untouched wilderness, Clare realistically concentrates on the natural community that is available. He knows that humans have affected nature by altering it to increase their own comfort. Simply inviting nature into the speaker's home challenges this paradigm. The speaker desires a cottage surrounded with nature. Integrating his animal neighbors' comfort with his own reveals a budding

awareness that humans cannot be the only creatures consulted while building a structure.

Clare asks that people mingle humanity and nature, to benefit and comfort both.

Identifying the pastoral and georgic tropes make Clare's deceptively simple poem less ambiguous. He argues that humans and nature need to blend; describing a cottage that is a gift "worth the giving" provides a template for how that can be accomplished. He demonstrates that, through enclosure, land theft is an inescapable reality; rural farmers must learn to live within this new, enclosure-inflected system and protect themselves however they can—even if that means fencing their land. Clare's point, however, only emerges when we compare his writing to classic georgic and pastoral poetry.

Pastoral Work: "The Cottager"

This method similarly illuminates Clare's other poems. Furthermore, analyzing these generic undertones helps to link disparate poems. Applying this analysis to a poem like "The Cottager" reveals not only its own implicit environmental argument but also its relationship to a poem like "Proposals for Building a Cottage." "The Cottager" explores a typical rural farmer's life, revealing his past and present and hinting at his future. The poem's dark overarching message reveals pressing problems. Clare suggests that modern life has endangered rural farmers of the cottager's ilk. Clare combines pastoral and georgic elements, but quite differently than he did in "Proposals for Building a Cottage." In "The Cottager," Clare has disguised a georgic as a pastoral.

Because they are distinguished more by tone than by genre markers, georgics often resist easy identification, and "The Cottager" is no exception. Kevis Goodman questions whether georgic poetry forms "a strictly defined genre or," instead, "a mode

exerting a rhizomatic underpresence across a variety of affiliated descriptive and didactic verses” (1). Whether or not georgic poetry comprises a genre, georgic poems share several characteristics. All georgic poetry concentrates on work. Virgil’s *Georgics* are farming manuals; georgic poetry since Virgil tends to eschew specific instructions and instead celebrates the idea of work. Either way, georgic poetry, as Low points out, is “preeminently about the value of hard and incessant labor” (8). David Ferry writes that Romantic georgic poetry links “admiration and pity for the incessant labors of men” “with anxiety about the vulnerability of the culture that labor constructs” (“Introduction,” *Georgics* xvii). Furthermore, georgic poems tend to be rooted in the past. Raymond Williams argues that Virgil’s *Georgics* are characterized by “idealisation” and “extended retrospect,” a tone that “is not yet abstracted from the whole of working country life” (17). Georgic poems also stress “obscure private individuals who perform small tasks the cumulative effect of which is to transform society” (Low 6). Georgic poetry is nation-building poetry. Perhaps most importantly, georgic poems stress building a relationship with the land, rather than working against it.

“The Cottager” displays the georgic preoccupation with time and retrospection, desire for an alliance between human and non-human nature, and dream of stabilizing and transforming society. Indeed, Clare’s poem, much like Virgil’s *Georgics*, offers to guide readers. However, the poet does not outline how to create the ideal farm; instead, he outlines how to become the ideal farmer. Despite these clear connections to georgic poetry, “The Cottager” does not fully match the georgic template.

Clare's poem is not a straightforward georgic because it elides the cottager's work. Describing the farmer rather than his work makes the poem feel, at first blush, like a pastoral. Additionally, this poem has little actual labor; when Clare does describe work, he uses scant detail, which makes the poem seem more characteristically leisurely pastoral. Nevertheless, this poem's parallels to classic georgic poetry remain compelling. Most strikingly, the cottager does not cultivate any leisure activities and he denigrates the only mentioned leisure activity—singing at Christmastime—arguing that “it [is] a sin to sing” (“Cottager,” 33-38). Moreover, the cottager's relationship to nature also highlights the poem's georgic portions.

Clare highlights classic farming knowledge, implicitly critiquing modern farming. The cottager “views new knowledge with suspicious eyes / And thinks it blasphemy to be so wise” (“Cottager” 9-10). While Clare mocks his cottager, this mockery simultaneously critiques modern technology. The cottager considers farming methods disconnected from nature blasphemy, a suspicion that parallels the georgic preoccupation with a faded “Golden Age of Agriculture.” Low calls this regression a “devolution...from a primal Golden Age of pastoral ease and abundance” (11). The georgic remains rooted in the past because their composers idealize the past. Highlighting the cottager's suspicions regarding modern technology reinforces this idealistic retrospection. “Oer steams almighty tales” the cottager “wondering looks / As witchcraft gleaned from old black letter books” (“Cottager” 11-12). Equating modern technology and witchcraft suggests scorn, but the cottager's georgic comfort with traditional farming methods and discomfort with newness suggests an attempt to return to a better agricultural era.

The cottager utilizes traditional information sources, eschewing modern knowledge. Rather than using “old black letter books,” the cottager “weekly hunts the almanacks for rain” (Clare, “Cottager” 70). The cottager depends on traditional knowledge and never considers new methods. Indeed, his understanding further ties him to the natural environment, suggesting that he does not hold himself apart from the nonhuman world. Indeed, he points out that “Here and no further learnings channels ran,” linking the man’s knowledge to nature (“Cottager” 71). He may gently mock the cottager’s dislikes, but that does not imply that historic methods are wrong. Clare considers the traditional, communal farming methods better than the modern equivalent, which exploits people and the land to increase profits.

While the cottager’s mistrust of technologically advanced farming methods marks the poem’s georgic roots, the cottager’s noticeable misanthropy reveals the poem’s pastoral ones. The cottager has more sympathy for animals than humans. Clare writes that the cottager

...thinks the angler mad and loudly storms
With emphasis of speech oer murdered worms
And hunters cruel—pleading with sad care
Pity’s petition for the fox and hare
Yet feels self satisfaction in his woes
For wars crushed myriads of his slaughtered foes (“Cottager” 25-30)

While Clare mocks his character, he casts the cottager’s sympathy as mildly ridiculous, not wrong. The cottager pities all creatures, from worms to foxes, but lumps all human foes together. Clare emphasizes animal diversity, and the fact they need to be protected and considered fellow community members, rather than humans, who are less important

because they wreak havoc wherever they go. Clare contrasts animals and humans to stress his preferred community: he would rather live among animals than unfeeling humans.

Negatively describing the new vicar further emphasizes the cottager's distrust.

He finds the new vicar unusual and incomprehensible:

And while at church he often shakes his head
To think what sermons the old Vicar made
Down right and orthodox that all the land
Who had their ears to [h]ear might understand
But now such mighty learning meets his ears
He thinks it greek or lattan which he hears ("Cottager" 41-46)

Once again, making the cottager's dislike unfounded gently mocks the cottager. The new young vicar marks a new era in the cottager's life, but this newness is his only flaw. The cottager, more comfortable with what he knows, considers the vicar's words foreign ramblings. Strikingly, by disdaining Virgil's language ("lattan"), the cottager solidifies the poem's roots, though his reaction questions classical poetry's accessibility. These ancient poems contain important knowledge, but the cottager cannot access the same teachings as the vicar. The vicar's sermons are not negated because of the cottager's ignorance, but it does question education's availability. Georgic poetry repeatedly demonstrates that the past can teach us much, but if the wider public cannot access these lessons, how can society change? Clare hints that education is another significant topic, though he does not pursue this idea here.

Rather than exploring education, Clare shifts his focus to time, which further reveals the poem's georgic background. Clare explores how time differs for rural

workers. McKusick notes that Clare frequently effaces “indications of chronology or causality in favour of a synchronic moment that reflects the daily and seasonal patterns of agricultural activity and biological existence” (McKusick 236). Overall, Clare's time “is at odds with the dominant Western cognitive categories of causality and chronology;” this places “his poetry outside the technological mainstream and within an alternative cultural tradition that is more in harmony with the biotic rhythms of the natural world” (McKusick 236).

Reflecting these ideas, the poem's beginning evokes chronological time. The cottager, “[t]rue as the church clock hand the hour pursues,” “plods about his toils” (“Cottager” 1-2). Opening the poem with artificially regulated days draws attention to industrialism's negative aspects. Mechanization's presence demonstrates how far the world has come since Virgil. Daylight no longer governs the world; instead, people have adopted and developed new ways to mark the day's passage. The cottager's community must maintain a clock, because industrialism controls society. Displacing seasonal time troubles Clare because it alienates humans from non-human nature.

Because he farms, the cottager must depend on natural cycles, not artificial time, to regulate his day. The cottager's workday depends on the season, a reliance that marks this poem's georgic undercurrents. During “[w]inter and spring toil ceas[es] ere tis dark” and the cottager “[r]ests with the lamb and rises with the lark” (“Cottager” 99-100). The cottager has no practical use for industrial time because his work day depends on nature. Virgil himself highlights the necessity of following natural time, writing that “[t]here are many tasks it's better to preform / In the very early morning, just at sunrise, / When the

dew is everywhere, or in the night, / When it's certain to be cool" (*Georgics* 25). Because the cottager keeps seasonal time, he maintains his freedom from industrial society.

However, avoiding regulated time has contributed to his isolation. Because his day depends on the season and when his animals are awake to work, the cottager does not seem to interact with other humans; his entire day revolves around nature. His human community does not follow a similar schedule, which allows the cottager to drift closer to nature while his industrializing community drifts further away.

Ultimately, seasonal time and industrial time collapse into personified time. Clare remarks that "Time scarcely noticed turns his hair to grey / Yet leaves him happy as a child at play" ("Cottager" 103- 104). Time becomes confused and even begins to run backwards because the cottager appears to ignore its passage. Virgil similarly emphasizes nonlinear time. In the *Georgics*, Virgil recommends observing "where in the sky / Saturn's cold star retires to; where in the sky / The wandering fires of Mercury can be seen" (29). Virgil's depiction of time also uses personification, though he includes religious markers more than Clare. Virgil also personifies time in his pastoral poetry. In the first eclogue, Tityrus comments that "Freedom took her own sweet time about it / And waited till my first gray hairs showed up" to favor him (5). Tityrus personifies freedom more than time, but still utilizes personification to mark time's passing. Clare echoes this metaphorical version of time. Presumably because the cottager does not mark time's passage, he can be happier than those who live their lives according to an artificial timetable. Indeed, becoming temporally unmoored allows the cottager to reclaim his childhood's peace and happiness.

Clare's depiction of the cottager's threatened posterity, however, shows the negative effects of backwards-running time. The cottager's reversion to childhood forces us to consider his familial situation and his desire for posterity. His family Bible's "blank leaves" "display a worlds epitome of names / Parents and children and grandchildren" ("Cottager" 55-59), which attests to his abundance of family. Tracing the cottager's ancestry—a long, unbroken line lasting several generations—echoes the georgic emphasis on family and rootedness. However, Clare's poem does not explicitly depict the cottager's family. The cottager keeps a few keepsakes ("Cottager" 89-94), but the children's absence from the poem suggests that they are not present in the cottager's life. The cottager's wife's complete absence raises further problems. He seems to have lost every chance of insuring posterity.

Georgic poetry celebrates stability; stability means that the farmland will be passed down and cared for. This stability is absent from Clare's poem. Farming families form society's bedrock in georgic poetry. When families start to disappear, the state—indeed, even civilization itself—begins to fail. Clare ends the poem with a nostalgic but sadly isolated image of the cottager:

Content is helpmate to the days employ
And care neer comes to steal a single joy
Time scarcely noticed turns his hair to grey
Yet leaves him happy as a child at play ("Cottager" 103-104)

The ending is disturbing because it leaves no hope for the future. An abstract concept ("content") occupies the role that ought to belong to a wife and helpmate. Furthermore, the cottager, no more than a child, will be unable to pass along his farm. The cottager's

misplaced happiness furthers the reader's sense that an era has passed. In a traditional georgic, no one would question what makes the man happy. Like the old Corycian man in Virgil's *Georgics*, a man who "made for himself a happiness / That was equal to the happiness of kings" by making his tiny plot the fairest in the area (151), the cottager hopes to leave his farm a better place—better cultivated, better cared for, more nourishing, and more beautiful. However, the poem signals his hope's end. In Virgil's poem, the Old Corycian has no family, no assurance that his farm will be cared for after his death. Virgil breaks off the old man's story because this happy old farmer has nothing about which to be happy. Clare's employs the same theme. Without assured continuity, the man's happiness seems unfounded and impossible. Whether Clare aims his comments at the unfeasibility of georgic posterity or modern's life instability, the fact remains that the cottager has no heirs—that all his work will come to naught.

Clare's economic characterization further emphasizes the cottager's inappropriate happiness. Not only interested in the cottager's household management, the poet also examines the political economy that governs life for a man like the cottager. The word economy, as many point out, arises from the Greek word for household management.⁴ This meaning held true until the Industrial Revolution arrived in the 1700s. While the first formal economists, including Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, started formalizing the relationship between the state and economics beforehand, it was not until later in the 1800s that "economy" shifted to include the "organization or condition of a community or nation with respect to economic factors, esp. the production and consumption of goods

⁴ My discussion of the word "economy" references the *OED*, unless otherwise cited.

and services and the supply of money” (“economy”). The shift from a rural to an urban society paralleled this shift in meaning. “In agricultural communities the destruction of home industry was accompanied by the acceleration of the process of enclosing fields...for more efficient agriculture” (Stillinger and Lynch 3). The poor suffered the most from this shift, and they were forced to either “migrate to the industrial towns or [remain] as farm laborers, subsisting on starvation wages” (Stillinger and Lynch 3). Clare is not the only writer to identify the destructiveness of shifting from a home-based to a state-based economy.

Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* also explores how home and state economies fractured. While critics are still debating Thoreau’s engagement with pastoral and georgic tropes,⁵ he does not veil his interest in his local economies. Thoreau, observing that the “inhabitants [of Concord] have appeared to [him] to be doing penance in a thousand remarkable ways,” dedicates his book to the discovery of “whether it is necessary that [life] be as bad as it is, whether it cannot be improved as well as not” (46). Particularly interested in how property ownership created negative side effects, Thoreau writes that he has seen “young men...whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of” (47). Perhaps most relevant to Clare’s economic argument is Thoreau’s observation that “the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to

⁵ For more on Thoreau’s engagement with the pastoral tradition see Lawrence Buell’s “American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised,” Greg Garrard’s “Wordsworth and Thoreau: Two Versions of Pastoral,” and Kenneth Egan’s “Thoreau’s Pastoral Vision in ‘Walking.’” Thoreau also engaged with the georgic tradition, as demonstrated in Michael Ziser’s essay “*Walden* and the Georgic Mode.”

be anything but a machine” (48). For Thoreau, political economy has overwhelmed man, who now has no time to properly govern their households. Political and household economies are irreconcilable; furthermore, when political economy rules, environmental exploitation and destruction follow. Returning to a more thoughtful and deliberate household economy would not only save men—it would save the environment. Clare also sees political economy as anathema to household economy, though unlike Thoreau he does not seem to think the answer lies the latter. The answer lies, naturally, is a more georgic society that mingles humans and nature.

The contrast Clare draws between household and political economy illuminates the cottager’s mundane household habits. Clare lingers on the cottager’s financial situation. Early in the poem, Clare writes, “Life gave him comfort but denied him wealth / He toils in quiet and enjoys his health” (“Cottager” 13-14). Clare admires the cottager’s disregard of urban values such as wealth and industrial time, for work and health are more important. Furthermore, the cottager “runs no scores on tavern screens to clear” (Clare, “Cottager” 16). Clare implies that the cottager has steadfastly avoided debt all his life because he is too busy to worry about money. However, the cottager’s disregard does not mean that he has avoided suffering. He may “[live] too happy to be poor / While strife neer pauses at so mean a door,” but that does not mean he lives comfortably (Clare, “Cottager” 95-96). As Thoreau points out in *Walden*, people like the cottager are one sickness away from complete devastation. The cottager exists in a society that no longer understands or respects him. Thus, he receives no help and when he dies, his ways will be forgotten. Political economy has ruined the cottager’s household management.

While there are no explicit references to enclosure, Clare nevertheless explores how government policy transforms the landscape and humans' relationship to the environment. The government expedites enclosure, enforcing political economy on the household. Enclosure has reorganized society at all levels; in so doing, it has irreversibly altered households. Clare's bleak economic message suggests that the cottager has no future because the community's common land been enclosed. The cottager's absent children cannot live like their father. They have, presumably, vanished to the city to find paying jobs. Without his children to take over the farm once he can no longer work, the cottager has lost his ancestors' stable posterity. The traditional life has vanished, simply because political economy intruded on private affairs and uprooted rural workers.

Emphasizing changing economic conceptions during Clare's lifetime exposes the poem's georgic roots. Georgic farmers are society's bedrock; with a stable agricultural sector, the entire country can thrive. Low argues that in georgic poetry, farming becomes "a cultural and a civilizing activity, a means of building up the state and ensuring its peaceful prosperity;" he further considers the georgic mode "preeminently...suited to the establishment of civilization and the founding of nations" (8, 12). Therefore, in a georgic, when agricultural laborers are displaced, mistreated, or troubled, the entire state suffers. Clare draws on this trope. Because men like the cottager cannot survive, their displacement threatens their country's future. Clare argues that enclosure has not helped support the state; because enclosure has disrupted traditional farmers, the consequent irreparable damage could end civilization. "The Cottager" does not end hopefully;

Clare's innocuous and cheerful words become an implicit apocalyptic message. Because the cottager lacks allies and a future, no one has a future.

In many ways, Clare honors the cottager; the man becomes the ideal towards which to aspire. However, his protagonist still displays naivety. Overall, Clare seemingly denigrates the economic system that has placed the cottager in such a tenuous state, but his criticism is veiled. He does, however, make very direct comments on enclosure in "The Mores," a poem that does not obviously fit into the pastoral and georgic dichotomy but still relies on classical connections to formulate an environmental argument.

Enclosing Nature: "The Mores"

"The Mores" traces specific changes that enclosure has wrought on both the human community and the natural world, primarily by invoking the georgic differences between a pre- and postlapsarian world. "Proposals for Building a Cottage" and "The Cottager" revolve around the individual's relationship with nature, while also seeking to build a new community. In "The Mores," however, the countryside's trauma post-enclosure becomes communal and mimics a traditional georgic's contrast between pre- and postlapsarian worlds. Unraveling these classical references allows a clearer view of the poem's environmental aspects to emerge. Like Clare's earlier poems, "The Mores" draws on georgic and pastoral tropes, but more subtly because it is less about individual farmers and more about agricultural communities. Nevertheless, analyzing the poem's georgic and pastoral elements uncovers Clare's environmental argument: we need to form a mingled community.

Much like “The Cottager,” “The Mores” relies on georgic retrospection to illustrate how the landscape has changed since enclosure. The poem’s opening describes enclosure’s dramatic visual effects. After describing the commons, which traditionally “never felt the rage of blundering plough,” Clare invokes the area’s openness:

Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye
Its only bondage was the circling sky (“Mores” 7-10)

Clare repeatedly emphasizes the ability to move freely. Before enclosure, there were fewer limitations and people lived harmoniously with nature. This opening passage disparages farming, casting the plough not as civilization’s tool, but instead as a destructive and short-sighted force. More interested in pre-agricultural land than in properly farmed land, Clare argues that agriculture removes people from their natural community to some extent, no matter how thoughtfully they farm. Even the most careful farmer alters their land; enclosure, though, makes such changes more destructive and less inclusive. This contrast between pre-enclosure life and post-enclosure life mirrors the georgic’s traditional emphasis on a postlapsarian world.

Virgil contrasts life before work and contemporary life, when work is everything. He writes that before “Jove’s time no farmer plowed the earth; / It was forbidden to mark out field from field / ...men shared / All things together and Earth quite freely yielded / The gifts of herself she gave, being unasked” (*Georgics* 12-13). His vision, which predates the Biblical Garden of Eden, shows a world without labor, because nature gives its bounty freely; privatization, even to claim family plots, is taboo. In the world before

the fall, work and private property are unknown. Virgil shows that it was Jupiter who caused life's difficulties, though he did this "so want should be / The cause of human ingenuity, / And ingenuity the cause of arts" (*Georgics* 13). Virgil acknowledges how struggle and work benefit humans, sparking inventiveness and creativity. He presents a much more compassionate postlapsarian life than the Christian version and argues that only through falling did humans become fully human.

Because Virgil's poetry was written before Christianity, his fall is not purely theological. Ferry's introduction to the *Georgics* observes that man's fall is not man's fault, but simply the way "things are, and are going to be, for all creatures, the hills and seas, the fields, the grain, the vines, the beasts and birds, the bees, and the creature man himself" (xii). In Virgil's vision, falling was inevitable. Humans were not meant to exist without work; likewise, nature was not meant to produce for human comfort:

It is remarkable how in this great work the triumphs and sufferings of the creatures other than man are fully meaningful and substantiated in themselves; they're never merely background for, nor merely metaphors for, the story of man. The dignity of what they are is never exploited as pathetic fallacy; there is no condescension in the poem toward those others who share our fallen world with us. (Ferry, "Introduction," *Georgics* xiii)

A postlapsarian world may be unavoidable, but that does not mean it is easy. Because all must struggle alike, there is no reason to mistreat or condescend to nature. Nature and humans both suffer, and paying heed to that misery exposes their connections. Clare also emphasizes the postlapsarian world.

However, Clare presents the fall differently. Whereas Virgil contrasts a laborious life and life before labor, Clare contrasts life after enclosure with life before enclosure.

To Clare, man's fall is not connected to religion, but rather to economics and industrialism. The fall occurs when enclosure arrives in Helpston; to the poet, enclosure and industrial farming did more to destroy life and agricultural workers' futures than any other force. Clare explores this point repeatedly—starting with the contrast he draws between the pre-enclosure and post-enclosure countryside. Before enclosure, “unbounded freedom” ruled; now the whole countryside is controlled.

The changing landscape marks the most obvious differences between pre-enclosure and post-enclosure life. Clare begins by describing how current life differs from his childhood:

Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours,
Free as spring clouds and wild as summer flowers
Is faded all—a hope that blossomed free
And hath been once no more shall ever be (“Mores” 15-19)

Clare cites images from his childhood that are free of farming and enclosure and argues that his childhood freedom is unavailable to modern people. Furthermore, he equates adulthood with enclosure and childhood with freedom, making an implicit economic argument. Children can enjoy nature for what it is, rather than worrying about money, work, and success. Adults become trapped in an economic system that prevents them from enjoying nature and instead forces them to focus on material gain. Enclosure, in other words, has broken his neighbors' childlike—and, he argues, pure—relationship with nature and forced them to only consider nature in economic terms. Clare hints at this idea in “The Cottager,” but he develops it fully here.

In “The Cottager,” we receive an implicit economic argument, one that hides any real criticism with misdirection and ellipses. Obliquely discussing economic issues is a georgic tradition (though it is also present in pastoral poetry). “The Mores,” however, eschews the classical elision and presents a straightforward evaluation. Clare writes in “The Mores” that “Inclosure came and trampled on the grave / Of labours rights and left the poor a slave” (“Mores” 19-20). Personifying enclosure demonstrates the incredible power differential between rural laborers and urban politicians. The workers (and their rights) are passive, while enclosure appears dangerously active. Clare implies that the laborers’ rights had already died and been buried well before enclosure’s arrival. The poor had always had few rights, but enclosure eliminated any hope for equality.

However, the poor are not the only ones being treated unfairly. “The Mores” illustrates how human activities alter life for both humans and the environment. Before enclosure ruined the scene, the “only bondage was the circling sky” (“Mores” 10). All living things could be free, before fences obstructed pathways and views. Enclosure’s fences have changed the entire community, wounding humans, plants, and animals alike:

Cows went and came with evening morn and night
To the wild pasture as their common right
And sheep unfolded with the rising sun
Heard the swains shout and felt their freedom won
Tracked the red fallow field and heath and plain
Then met the brook and drank and roamed again
The brook that dribbled on as clear as glass
While the glad shepherd traced their tacks along
Free as the lark and happy as her song (Clare, “Mores” 26-34)

In this pre-enclosure vision, all roam freely. Animals and humans are happy, peaceful, and untroubled in this prelapsarian, pastoral vision. Humans and nature form a unified community; indeed, Clare blurs the lines between animals and humans, creating a composite shepherd who is man and lark. The fence destroys this vision:

...now alls fled and flats of many a dye
That seemed to lengthen with the following eye
Moors loosing from the sight far smooth and blea
Where swopt the plover in its pleasure free
Are vanished now with commons wild and gay ("Mores" 35-39)

Humans, animals, and plants once shared the commons, a vision of georgic harmony and unity. When enclosure privatized all this land, humans felt the loss, but they seem the least harmed. Birds, among other animals, also experience enclosure's consequences. Typically, fences do not trouble birds, who are free to fly where they will. Clare even uses the beautiful word "swoop" to invoke their freedom. In "The Mores," however, enclosure even cages wild birds.

Clare soon shifts his focus to creatures more obviously constrained by new property lines. Now "[f]ence...meets fence in owner's little bounds" and "men and flocks" are "imprisoned ill at ease" ("Mores" 47, 50). Clare's mingled community suffers because of enclosure. Clare argues that strangers lacking local knowledge—the same humans viewed suspiciously in both the *Georgics* and *Eclogues*—divided the land indiscriminately, destroying natural relationships that had taken generations to develop, which has resulted in the entire ecosystem's imprisonment.

Clare uses this captivity to demonstrate the connections between humans and the natural environment. Enclosure confines humans and the natural environment, a characteristically georgic, community-oriented argument. Clare concludes “The Mores” by returning once again to enclosure’s negative effects:

This with the poor scared freedom bade good bye
And much the[y] feel it in the smothered sigh
And birds and trees and flowers without a name
All sighed when lawless laws enclosure came (“Mores” 74-78)

Clare puts the entire natural world on the same level as the country poor; both the “birds and trees and flowers” and the poor lost their freedom. Enclosure has profoundly scarred, and even ruined, the natural world. Demonstrating enclosure’s negative consequences for humans and nature reflects Clare’s indebtedness to georgic poetry; Virgil also believed that humans must seek to build a non-anthropocentric community.

Clare returns to birds to demonstrate that human laws controlling nature is lunacy. Clare evokes *As You Like It*’s haphazardly hung love poetry when he describes placing signs in trees:

A board [that] sticks up to notice ‘no road here’
And on the tree with ivy overhung
The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung
As tho the very birds should learn to know
When they go there they must no further go (“The Mores” 70-74)

Far-off humans seem to think that the proper signs will stop people and animals from wandering across what is suddenly private property. Clare demonstrates this idea’s astounding and comic hubris. Fences and signs do not confine birds; property lines

cannot stop nature. Disconnected politicians have put artificial, and useless, lines across natural landscapes, which permanently harms all life.

However, by comparing nature and the poor Clare forces us to confront a potential problem. Is he denigrating the poor? Is he arguing that the poor are somehow subhuman? Clare's lines minimize human suffering. Indeed, we might read "The Mores" as one man's overreaction to enclosure. However, reading Clare's poetry as a disparagement of rural laborers is the anthropocentric one. Identifying the poet's mingled community overcomes a human-centered approach. Clare unites humans and animals; they share many characteristics, which means that any human law will governs both humans and nature. His environmental argument has precedent: Virgil also argues, albeit more implicitly, for a non-anthropocentric community. He points out that humans have to work with nature, because to do otherwise causes suffering. Clare, however, explores this issue more deeply, perhaps because of his era's economic shifts. Clare, arguably, sees enclosure's monetized emphasis as causing the greatest rift between humans and nature.

Thoroughly destabilized by his village's enclosure, Clare wrote a poem that describes enclosure's problematic effects. The poem demonstrates how humans and nature form a single community. Because humans and nature share the same place, enclosure irreparably changes both. Perhaps enclosure's worst effect was the way it changed how people interacted with the land. Enclosure divided man and animal, creating two separate worlds that were both traumatized by new property lines.

Rebellion and Complacency: The Badger Poems

Clare envisions two responses to enclosure: complacency or fruitless rebellion. With this dichotomy in mind, we must scrutinize Clare's animal poems—poems that seemingly have no bearing on enclosure or environmentalism. "The Badger" and "The Tame Badger" become more powerful, if more ambiguous, once we understand Clare's environmental message. Neither poem feels indebted to georgic or pastoral poetry, but they feature Clare's environmentalism. Within this new context, "The Badger," a short, comic poem, becomes an impassioned battle for freedom, while "The Tame Badger" explores complacency's effects. The wild badger can be read as an individual who struggles against injustice and the tame badger can be seen as the individual who attempts to accept injustice and exist as best they can. The tame badger, in this reading, becomes linked with the cottager—a man who is doing all he can to survive, but who has no real future or legacy. The wild badger has more in common with the man describing his cottage, who demands the cottage as a gift while simultaneously rebelling against typical cottage construction.

The first four sonnets detail the long, drawn-out battle between hunters and a wild badger. While the animal dies, he does not lose the battle. "The Tame Badger," conversely, acts as a one-sonnet postscript to "The Badger." It details a domesticated badger's confined and rather unpleasant life. Unlike Clare's longer poems, neither badger poem echoes georgic or pastoral poetry, but he nevertheless utilizes these classic poems' messages. As always, humans and animals form a community, though in the badger poems Clare's community lacks kinship with or obligation towards nature.

Clare discusses many creatures in his animal poems, including hares, hedgehogs, and, unexpectedly, badgers. These poems generally seem to straightforwardly describe various common animals' lives and habits. The badger poems are remarkable not just because they revolve around an animal that has been almost completely neglected by the poets, but because of their form. "The Badger" and "The Tame Badger" consist of five sonnets, a form of poetry traditionally reserved for love poems. David Perkins suggests that since these poems were not published in Clare's lifetime, we have no clues as to how "Clare might have revised and arranged these sonnets for publication, or whether he would have published any or all of them" (401).⁶ While Perkins sees all five sonnets as a unit, I have chosen to consider them as two distinct poems, because the shift between the wild badger and the tame badger is extraordinary and imagining them as one unified poem is difficult.

Clare begins in the wild. The badger, "[w]ith nose on ground," "runs a awkward pace / And anything will beat him in the race" ("Badger" 5-6), but he maintains a certain freedom, even causing hunters to fall as they rush through the woods ("Badger" 12-14). The badger is not a majestic animal; it is not beautiful, it is not even useful—but Clare still considers the badger worthwhile. He thinks the badger is an interesting and poetic animal because of its ability to undermine humans. The badger's subversive power emerges during its struggle for freedom.

⁶ Perkins further points to Clare's mental state at the time—as his health declined and his estrangement grew, Clare wrote poems that reflected his unsettled state (402).

The hunt's beginning disrupts all nature. As the hunters lie in wait, "The old fox hears the noise and drops the goose / The poacher shoots and hurrys from the cry / And the old hare half wounded buzzes bye" (Clare, "Badger" 20-22). The badger's trapping disrupts all nature, which harkens back to Clare's environmental argument. Nature is intertwined and one creature's capture disturbs other creatures' lives. While nature's interdependence is innate knowledge for the non-human community, humans do not acknowledge it. After catching the badger, the humans take him to town and "bait him all the day with many dogs" (Clare, "Badger" 24-25), a terribly unnatural end for a wild animal. The badger is not food, nor is he a nuisance to the human community. He is entertainment. The badger's baiting, however, is not straightforward. While Perkins notes that during baiting "an animal was chained and dogs were set upon it, usually seriatim, until the baited animal was killed" (387), Clare's badger escapes, leading the hunters on a chase that devolves into what can only be described as slapstick.

At every turn during his run for freedom, the badger manages to make the humans appear foolish. The animal "runs long and bites at all he meets" ("Badger" 27), fighting back against those who would kill him, and several times "[h]e turns about to face the loud uproar / And drives the rebels to their very doors" ("Badger" 29-30). He refuses to accept his death and fights back. Wresting control from the humans, the badger's response suggests that they do not control nature. This scene illustrates the great divide between humans and animals. Just as enclosure sought to control the countryside, humans seek to dominate the badger. Such control is comically futile. Signs do not stop birds, and badgers will not voluntarily entertain humans.

Clare utilizes martial diction (especially “rebels”), indicating that this local struggle represents a much wider conflict. The battle occurs between repressive forces and free individuals. Strikingly, the badger’s ferocity frightens the hunters’ dogs (“Badger” 35-40), suggesting that the wild possesses extraordinary power. Humans may attempt to destroy or domesticate nature, but that does not necessarily work. Wild nature is more powerful, though it is not nearly as organized. People during Clare’s era frequently invoked martial comparisons when baiting animals. Perkins points out that baiting was justified “by arguing that it fostered military prowess. Baiting was said to inure to violence, bloodshed, brutality, and the presence of death, and to inspire with a spectacle of courage” (390). The badger’s pursuers demonstrate these characteristics, but rather than being the victim, he becomes the rebel hero. The badger’s struggle exemplifies an unsuccessful rebellion; he dies a martyr and a hero, an unjust sport’s victim.

The badger’s demise concludes the poem, but the animal maintains his powerful position. Even as he falls, as if dead, to the ground, and is “kicked by boys and men,” he starts up again and “drives the crowd agen / Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies / And leaves his hold and cackles groans and dies” (“Badger” 51-54). The badger’s cackle suggests that he laughs at death. Perkins sees the word “cackle” as “wonderfully fresh, homely, and descriptively realistic,” but considers it “grotesque in a death scene” (406). In Perkins’s reading, the badger is “rude” and “uncouth” (406), but he does not address the poem’s wider political ramifications.

I see the badger as defiant till the very end; I see the badger dying as a hero. Clare envisions the badger as not only an honored member of the local community, but also as a model for emulation. When placed alongside Clare's environmental poems about enclosure, "The Badger" represents a call to arms. People, Clare seems to suggest, must to struggle against injustice as the badger struggles against death. It will not be easy—and may be fruitless—but such efforts remain necessary and important.

In contrast, "The Tame Badger" describes a domesticated animal. Initially, he is considered "tame as a hog" ("Tame" 55). However, even this comparison seemingly retains too much wildness; later, Clare compares him to a dog. The badger "follows like the dog," "like a dog he never bites the men," and he "trys to play / & never trys to bite or run away" ("Tame" 56, 61, 64-65). This comparison implies that the domesticated badger is loyal and friendly, which contrasts sharply with the wild badger.

However, despite his domestication, the badger retains his wild skills. He can still fight—indeed, "[he] beats" his opponents "and scarcely wounded goes away" ("Tame" 58). Somehow he is still able to fight as if he were wild, even though he does not have the same ornery attitude towards humans. The poem's end gives no clues about the badger's future:

They let him out and turn a barrow down
And there he fights the pack of all the town
He licks the patting hand and trys to play
And never trys to bite or run away
And runs away from noise in hollow tree[s]
Burnt by the boys to get a swarm of bees (63-68)

Perkins suggests that this ending reveals that the tame badger is subject to different types of baiting. The badger is “baited either by chaining it and setting dogs on it or by placing it in a barrel and trying whether the dogs can drag it out” (Perkins 402). However, there is no indication that when the tame badger is freed he attempts to escape or flee the town. The final two lines highlight the badger’s domestication, though ambiguously. The tame badger runs away from strange wild noises, but Clare does not indicate where the animal goes.

Clare includes bees in this poem, an inclusion that links this poem with Virgil, who writes at length about bees and beekeeping in the *Georgics*. Indeed, Virgil sees bees as closely related to humans; he introduces them in the fourth georgic, saying, “And I’ll in order speak of magnanimous captains, / And of an entire nation, its character, / Activities, its tribes, and of their battles” (141). Because bees engage in similar activities, Virgil considers them remarkably human:

The bees have drunk from the light of heaven and have
A share in the divine intelligence,
For the god, they say, is there in everything
In earth and the range of sea and the depth of sky;
The flocks, the herds, and men, all creatures there are,
At birth derive their little lives from him,
And when they die their life returns to him,
And having been unmade is made again... (Virgil, *Georgics* 159)

Virgil connects humanity and nature—indeed, here he goes so far as to argue that all lives arise and return to the same source. This deep connection between nature and humans is clearly environmental. The world is available to all life. Clare’s subtle nod to Virgil allows us to read his badger poems as georgic and suggests that complacency is as

hopeless as rebellion. Virgil suggests that all life is connected; people can take comfort in their connection to all around them and the knowledge that problems are transitory.

Utilizing this theme, Clare suggests that despite outward appearances, very little separates the tame badger from the wild one. Both belong to the same community; both embody alternative ways to handle a common problem. Neither is better, because they are both involved in the same struggles.

Considering the five sonnets as two poems is not the only possibility. However, considering the badger poems as a single poem does not undermine my reading. For instance, combining the sonnets allows us to read the final stanza as an alternative history—it is what could have happened, if the wild badger had been captured and domesticated, rather than killed. However we break up the badger sonnets, they still display a particularly pessimistic vision and suggest that Clare sees no options for rural workers. Rebellion brings death; complacency offers few comforts and still brings death. Whether we consider the five stanzas on badgers as one or two poems, the effect is the same. Clare does not see a sustainable future for rural agriculture.

The badger poems are ambiguous, and potentially unfinished. However, they still support Clare's overall environmental argument. The two poems are interested in the relationship between humans and nature; indeed, they illustrate the consequences of an antagonistic relationship between human society and the natural community. Clare utilizes pastoral and georgic tropes to a much more subdued degree, but the spirit remains. These poems are still grounded in community, and they comment on enclosure's effects. They, like Clare's published poems, display a nascent environmental argument,

only clear when we read the poems not as “mere” animal poems, but instead juxtapose them to revised and published poems that utilize classic themes. This new comparison illustrates the poems’ metaphors and uncovers a stronger continuity between Clare’s early and his late, pre-asylum writings.

The Perfect Community: Conclusion

Clare imagines a community that mingles the natural environment and humans; this community emerges only when we understand his poetry’s georgic and pastoral undertones. These traditions offer a historical precedent for his environmental argument, but they also present it in terms that his contemporaries would have fully understood. Despite making his message generally accessible, however, Clare does not believe that everyone is equally able to create his ideal community. His poetry intimates that only certain people can balance humans and nature. These people must be like him: attuned to nature, willing to put the environment before human needs, and, most importantly, open to nature’s unique beauty. Clare does not believe that the politicians responsible for enclosure can join his ideal fellowship. He even seems to doubt his neighbors’ ability to enter his utopia. He is not alone. Across the Atlantic, another early environmental writer comes to the same conclusion.

Thoreau also envisions interactions that only admit the proper members. However, Thoreau reveals why not everyone has access to a mingled community: “By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives”

(Thoreau 211). Human flaws prevent most people from cooperating fruitfully. Thoreau sees some hope for such assemblies, if people change; Clare considers enclosure the end of any possibility of a non-anthropocentric community. Clare's hopelessness does not mean that his message is worthless. Indeed, his vision of a mingled community could still help shift us away from anthropocentric thinking. It is only by considering the needs of non-humans that we can truly overcome our egotism. If we keep birds in mind when we build our cottages; if we abandon artificial days; if we stop pretending that our fences can contain nature, then we might survive. Thoreau wrote "that in Wildness is the preservation of the World" (95). Clare's love of birds and liberty reflect the same sentiment. For Clare, freedom traces the swoop of a plover.

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“FLED FOR SHELTER TO A HEART OF NATURE”:

GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT IN MARY WILKINS FREEMAN’S *SIX TREES*

On April 18, 1903, *The Spectator* published a short review of Mary Wilkins Freeman’s new story collection, *Six Trees*. The review comments, “We cannot help thinking that these six ‘short stories’ would be better, or at least as good, without the six trees. More than once the sentiment which joins the two things is somewhat forced” (“Six Trees”). Remarkably, the review misreads Freeman’s goal, which an ecofeminist reading illuminates.

The stories in *Six Trees* (1903) revolve around a transformative experience. In “The Elm-Tree,” David Ransom flees to an elm to escape the poor-house, while Joseph Lynn finds company at a white birch’s foot. Because he spends time with a pine, Dick transforms from a shiftless drunkard into a superhuman worker. “The Balsam Fir” features a spinster who saves a tree from a woodsman’s ax to relieve her melancholy. Sarah Dunn, domineeringly mimicked by her distant cousin, allies with a Lombardy poplar and finds the strength to assert her individuality. “The Apple-Tree,” the volume’s most philosophical story, reveals how a close bond with the earth encourages redemptive qualities, while also demonstrating that disconnecting from the natural environment impacts humans negatively. The author inflects all the stories with a strong environmental argument informed by gender, which few scholars have acknowledged. She argues in each story that people need a connection to nature, whether nature is a great

pine in the wilderness or an ornamental poplar in the front yard. Lacking connection, people forget what is important; they overemphasize humanity and forget not only nature's innate value but also how it can promote spiritual enlightenment. Freeman asks her readers to replace outdated and anthropocentric religious models with a more inclusive spirituality that incorporates nature and encourages relationships between humans and nonhuman nature.

Freeman's early ecofeminism merits analysis not just because she was an extremely popular author, which means she had wide influence, but also because ecofeminist criticism characteristically stresses late twentieth century literature. Susan A. Mann locates ecofeminism's beginnings in the late nineteenth century but focuses primarily on non-fiction writers and activists. Arguably, literary ecofeminism began during the same era. Too often critics dismiss Freeman as merely popular, but I will shift her status from an economically successful writer to an ecofeminist with broad appeal and significant depth.

First establishing how other critics have assessed Freeman's writing, I will also examine ecofeminism generally, aiming to elucidate her particular version by studying each story in *Six Trees*. "The Elm Tree," for instance, focuses primarily on how nature can free men from patriarchal power. "The White Birch," on the other hand, examines nature's feminizing qualities while also casting it as comforter. "The Great Pine" foregrounds how nature enables a man to redefine masculine work. The female-centric stories paint a complementary picture. Both "The Balsam Fir" and "The Lombardy Poplar" showcase environmentally inspired female rebellions that allow women to

reorganize their lives and seize limited power. “The Apple Tree” contrasts those who ally with nature with those who regard nature in purely economic terms. Throughout all the stories, the illustrations form a meta-text, sometimes undercutting and at other times supporting the main text. Examining the interaction between the text and the illustrations allows Freeman’s ecofeminism to emerge. Ultimately, my analysis of *Six Trees* will demonstrate Freeman’s early ecofeminism and importance to the environmental canon. This collection broadens our environmental perspective by offering an unexpectedly rich proto-ecofeminist argument.

“Not the Standard Version”: Contextualizing *Six Trees*

During her lifetime, Freeman enjoyed enormous fame. Brent L. Kendrick points out that she “was one of the most significant and widely acclaimed women writers in American literature during the late 1880s, 1890s, and the early 1900s” (1). Indeed, Kendrick suggests that she “was so popular that her audience worshipped her” (1). Strikingly, he points out that Freeman was not merely celebrated:

If these few examples [of her popularity] be judged the indiscriminate applause of an undiscerning audience who would read anything, listen to anything, or watch anything, it must be kept in mind that acclaim came not from the public alone. It came from other quarters as well. Both critics and writers who held prominent positions in their own day and who seem to hold secure positions in ours also followed her career closely. (Kendrick 2)

Her fame among both readers and critics faded near her career’s end and especially after she died; her work was never completely lost, but even at her death only nine of her forty-one books remained in print (Kendrick 6). Kendrick posits several reasons for this decline, from the public’s changing tastes following World War I to scant biographical

material (4-7). Nevertheless, Freeman has received some attention from scholars, though scholarly work on her tends to come in waves and to concentrate on her pre-1900 writing (Kendrick 5). This critical neglect means that much remains unsaid about her work, especially her later work.

Six Trees deserves particularly sustained attention, because Freeman highly esteemed the collection. She considered these stories among her best, favoring them because they explored the symbolic and mystical themes that she avoided elsewhere. Writing to Fred Lewis Pattee, she remarks that “most of my work is not really the kind I myself like. I want more symbolism, more mysticism. I left that out because it struck me people did not want it, and I was forced to consider selling qualities” (Freeman, *Infant* 381). An incredibly astute businesswoman, as Charles Johanningsmeier reveals, Freeman allowed market dictates to influence her early writing. However, when she wrote *Six Trees*, she was well-established and more able to experiment. That being said, she did not utterly set aside her material interests. In a letter to her representative at Harper & Brothers, Freeman lays out her marketing plan for *Understudies*, published only three years before *Six Trees*:

I had thought of [my animal stories] being published in a little volume to be called—Understudies—I had also wondered if the Flower tales would make an attractive Holiday book, with possibly a colored frontispiece?. However, the books would be very small if the stories were to be published separately, and I know books of eighteen to twenty thousand words, are, unless in exceptional cases, not so saleable as others. (Freeman, *Infant* 244)

Clearly Freeman understood her marketability and accepted the risk she was taking in *Six Trees* by including symbolism and spirituality. Unfortunately, we lack any substantial

letters on the collection, which might help better establish her feelings. Despite Freeman's own fondness for the volume, critics have not lingered on it, favoring instead her earlier short stories.

This criticism can nevertheless illuminate what she accomplishes in *Six Trees*. Eileen Razzari Elrod argues that Freeman presents a feminist critique that is entirely contained within her religious beliefs. Elrod, who relies on several published and unpublished short stories and letters, suggests that Freeman "has been and remains of particular interest to feminist critics...who appreciate her surprising portrayals of ordinary women so frequently and understandably at odds with patriarchal culture" (226).

[Women in Freeman's stories insist] on a pragmatic application of religion based on common sense and compassion, and rooted in a specifically New England Puritan sense of rebellion and individual authority. The alternative religious vision that emerges in these tales posits a power struggle in which unassuming women successfully oppose and occasionally displace the minister or religious authority in the text...her heroines throw off the authority of tradition and assert an alternative authority founded on an internal sense of revelation. (Elrod 227)

Elrod discusses how Freeman's own life decisions complicate her feminist stories.

Though her argument helps establish Freeman's religious perspective and complicated feminism, it neglects nature's centrality in Freeman's stories. Especially in *Six Trees*, overlooking its presence simplifies her feminist perspective. Uniting Freeman's feminist and environmental beliefs with her spiritual leanings generates a more nuanced reading of *Six Trees*.

Shirley Marchalonis, in contrast to Elrod, focuses primarily on *Understudies* and *Six Trees* in two essays and examines the relationship between realism and

environmentalism in Freeman's work. She contends that in the latter volume, Freeman's "sensitive perceptions of human relationships to nature" are foremost ("Sharp" 233).

Elaborating in her later essay, she writes that "Freeman's trees have the mystical power to influence, inspire, or transform the human beings for whom they have significance":

Nature is not the standard version, with kindly and beautiful Nature leading man to God and proclaiming a oneness of all living things; nearly all her natural creatures remain alien and inviolate, mysteriously themselves, impenetrable by human beings, yet by these very qualities forcing the characters (or the reader) to examine self. ("Another" 233)

To Marchalonis, Freeman is interested in how nature's Otherness can remove people from their everyday existences and change their perspectives. However, Marchalonis does not differentiate between how males and females experience the natural environment.

Robert M. Luscher likewise assesses *Six Trees*, contending that it depicts "numerous characters who seek consolation in nature and memory" (Luscher 363). He further suggests that Freeman engages deeply with Emersonian thought:

Taken singly, any of Freeman's "tree" stories might seem as anomalous as a tree in the desert; together they possess a cumulative impact which the separate stories could not achieve, and constitute a small Emersonian forest amid the seemingly barren terrain of Freeman's spiritual landscape. (Luscher 365)

Despite connecting Freeman and Emerson, his argument insufficiently explores her ecological emphasis. For instance, when he discusses the two female-centric stories, Luscher argues that they display "the growth of self-reliance" because both stories demonstrate the "metamorphosis of spinsters whose confining roles have bred hidden

discontent with their narrow lives” (373). His analysis, however, neglects both stories’ trees.

Marchalonis and Luscher are not the only critics to touch upon Freeman’s environmentalism, though to date no one has examined *Six Trees*’s nexus of environmentalism, feminism, and spirituality. Often when scholars examine Freeman’s nature writing, they, like Marchalonis and Luscher, tend to focus on *Understudies* and *Six Trees*, as Karen L. Kilcup points out in *Fallen Forests*. Indeed, Kilcup shows that Freeman has experienced a “revival in the past three decades, mostly because of her work’s feminist inclinations and its study of rural communities” (230). Few scholars, however, combine Freeman’s nature writing and her feminism in an effort to explore her ecofeminist argument. Perry D. Westbrook’s asserts that Freeman’s writing demonstrates women’s lives’ narrow confines:

The setting for most of her stories, if dramatized, would be very simple; nine tenths of the action takes place in a kitchen, the other tenth in the best parlor. Out-of-doors nature is seen and appreciated, but from the kitchen window or on a walk to the village store to replenish the kitchen supplies. (32)

Though he notes the clear connection Freeman makes between nature and gender, Westbrook leaves her ecofeminism largely unexplored.

Before pursuing Freeman’s particular environmental beliefs, the theory in general deserves some attention. Ecofeminism is a complex web of theories, but, broadly speaking, it is, in Marcia B. Littenberg’s words, “a philosophical, political and literary movement that proposes a new, more vital environmentalist ethic emphasizing the connection between perceptions of gender and nature” (137). Noël Sturgeon argues that,

broadly speaking, ecofeminism “claims that the oppression, inequality, and exploitation of certain groups (people of color, women, poor people, LGBT people, Global South people, animals) are theoretically and structurally related to the degradation and overexploitation of the environment” (9). Susan Mann highlights ecofeminist activism, which “refers to the diverse range of women’s efforts to save the Earth, as well as to the transformations in feminist thought that have resulted in new conceptualizations of the relationship between women and nature” (1). Similarly, Barbara T. Gates contends that “ecofeminism involves activism as well as ideology and that both of these aspects of ecofeminism arose simultaneously worldwide” (7). Ecofeminism is deeply associated with—indeed, it nearly requires—activism.

While I will focus primarily on Freeman’s ecofeminist message rather than establishing her environmental activism, we should briefly identify how Freeman campaigned for change. So often activism refers to “the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” (“activism”), but this definition frequently discounts the role that writers (especially women writers) play. Kilcup argues that “for nineteenth-century Americans, especially women, writing and activism were virtually inseparable” (10); she outlines nineteenth century women writers’ specific tendencies, providing us with a way to understand Freeman’s activism: “While they often use the dominant society’s language and metaphors, they sometimes remake that language or reinterpret those metaphors as they express material relationships with nature that frequently involve spiritual connections” (Kilcup 12). Kilcup’s framework allows us to

see writing as activism, or at least as resistance to dominant paradigms. This framework potentially establishes Freeman's short stories as ecofeminist activism.

Freeman's decidedly transcendental spirituality appears throughout *Six Trees*. Susan M. Stone considers Freeman a "transcendental realist" (378). This type of transcendentalism is typified by an "insistence upon truth and accuracy of vision, promotion of self-culture, celebration of the real and commonplace, discovery and interpretation of intuited divinity, and...use of literary work to reform society" (Stone 378). Stone's concept of "intuited divinity" helps illuminate Freeman's particular spirituality, which has more to do with natural and sublime experiences than with conventional religion. Nature plays a central role in Freeman's spirituality; it impacts people on an individual level—there are no communal houses of worship—and people have to be open to its lessons. Her spirituality requires respect for the nonhuman world, a strong sense of individuality, and a willingness to rebel against restrictive societal expectations. Uncomfortable with traditional religion's hierarchical emphasis, Freeman's characters desire a close connection to nature and an understanding of personal power, which enable them to escape society's repressive gender expectations and create neutral spaces of self-empowerment and fulfillment. Freeman's spirituality and feminism are deeply intertwined, and neither can be separated from her environmentalism.

Freeman's ecofeminism is deeply concerned with the female experience of nature, though she does not exclude male experiences. Though some stories revolve solely around male characters and/or masculine trees, her argument demonstrates that she is actually concerned with the relationship between nature and gender, which is

ecofeminists' primary concern. Establishing males' connection to nature therefore becomes just as necessary as establishing women's bond. Indeed, throughout *Six Trees*, Freeman highlights how humans, regardless of gender, age, or class, connect with non-human nature, domestic or wild. She suggests that when people have a strong link to nature, they have access to a spirituality which allows them to escape gender expectations and create their own place in the community.

Retreating from Gender: "The Elm-Tree"

"The Elm-Tree" models how men can escape gendered power, exploring how nature can impact gender expectations. The central character has outlived his usefulness; relinquishing his independence and capitulating to his community's expectations that he will submit to their demands seems his only choice. Rather than allow his neighbors to control his future, though, the protagonist turns to nature and gains both a new spirituality and a new perspective on his future.

"The Elm-Tree" tells the story of David Ransom, a grumpy, fractious old man who retreats to nature and regains his childlike perspective, which enables him to escape gender expectations. Having lost his dream house, which he "had built...very largely with his own hands," David Ransom lives alone in a small shack, nursing indignation and anger (Freeman 6). His only friend in town is an old, deaf man, Abner Slocum, who lives with his daughter, Maria. David's groundless indignation slowly tires the town, and his relative poverty affects how the town channels its dissatisfaction. After his dream house burns down, his community decides he is dangerous, despite "his age and feebleness, and ought not to be at such entire liberty to work out his own devices, and that, moreover, he

ought, humanly speaking, to be cared for comfortably” (Freeman 17). The moment that Abner uncovers the town’s plan to send David to board with another farmer, he runs off to warn his friend. When the townsmen come to collect David, he cannot be found, because he is hiding in a majestic elm tree. Abner brings him food and water, until Maria discovers the two old men, finding David in the elm tree’s boughs, his face “inexpressibly changed” (Freeman 33). Rather than sending him to board with someone else, Maria coaxes David out of the tree, promising that she will take him in and care for him. The story ends relatively happily, with Abner and David sitting peacefully on Maria’s porch, telling the village’s children stories.

The elm tree transforms David’s perspective and allows him to adjust how he interacts with the world. Freeman demonstrates the tree’s influence by underscoring its maleness and its authority: “The elm-tree had his field to himself. He stood alone in a wide and deep expanse of wind-swept grass which once a year surged round him in foaming billows” (3). These two sentences not only emphasize the tree’s gender, but also “his” independence. Freeman carefully genders each of the collection’s six trees; therefore, beginning with this male tree not only emphasizes its overwhelming male power, but also shows how nature can be seen in masculine terms. The elm tree’s natural authority enables it to change David. Furthermore, by opening “The Elm Tree” with a male tree lording it over his immediate vicinity, Freeman stresses how men and women differ in their experience of gendered influence.

Tying the tree’s superlative qualities to its masculinity reveals gender’s possible positive potential. The tree’s maleness connects closely to its uniqueness: “[t]here was

not in the whole country-side another tree which could compare with him...He insisted upon a recognition of his beauty and grace” (Freeman 4). The tree’s exceptionality and overpowering influence are clearly tied to its gender. However, Freeman distinguishes between how humans use masculinity and how the tree does so. The elm does not force others to do anything or adhere to certain expectations. Instead, it simply is, and “he” allows everyone who comes near him to simply be themselves. Indeed, it is the tree’s very strength that seems to let people be as they want to be, lending them his power and strength. His ability to “force himself out of the landscape not only upon the eyes, but the very soul” becomes “proof of that which is outside and beyond. It became at such times, to some minds, something akin to a testimony of God” (Freeman 4-5). Thus Freeman connects the tree’s sway to spirituality. The tree inspires just as a vision of God does. His exceptional power removes him from this world. This elm grants access to another world and shows people, David in particular, how to escape gender expectations.

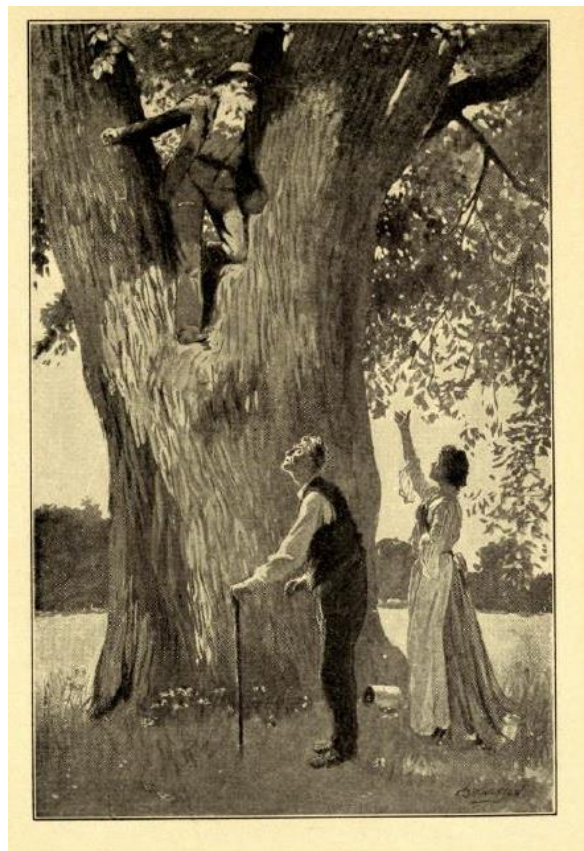
The tree’s religious power transforms David into an innocent child, a scene that the text and the illustrations treat as a miracle. When Maria discovers David in the elm, she sees that his face is that “of a man in shelter from the woes and stress of life. He looked forth from the beautiful arms of the great tree as a child from the arms of its mother. He had fled for shelter to a heart of nature, and it had not failed him. He smiled down at Maria with a peaceful triumph” (Freeman 33). Freeman marks David’s return to childhood as unusual. Rather than becoming a man who does both masculine and feminine work, as the protagonists of “The White Birch” and “The Great Pine” will do, David reverts to childhood, a state wherein he can escape all gendered duties. He no

longer needs to reflect gender oppression; he can simply exist, happily outside any power struggles. Freeman suggests that immersion in nature allows men to transcend their gender duties; accepting female work or abandoning responsibility entirely and regressing to childhood allows men to escape.

Luscher argues that David actually goes mad after his time in the elm (369-370), but this reading oversimplifies. Contending that David merely goes senile divides the story's gendered and environmental arguments. To understand its ecofeminism, we need to generate less constricted conclusions. Indeed, considering David senile also fully undermines Freeman's spirituality. Ultimately, the illustration supports my complex reading of David's transformation.

The final picture reaffirms the tree's miraculous transformative power while also displaying human smallness. The image shows David in the tree, with Maria well below him, trying to coax him down. Also at the base is Abner. He leans on a walking stick, looking aged and decrepit before David, who, apparently hale and hearty, has managed to climb high into the tree. At Maria's feet, there is a pail, probably the one that Abner used to deliver David's supper. The placement of

Figure 3. David in his elm tree



Maria's father, Abner, is the most striking element. He looks up into the tree, his face upturned like a religious devotee looking towards heaven. His face is even brightly lit, increasing his positioning's religious undertones. David is similarly lit, but he is not only positioned higher—his head looks straight ahead, not downward at the two figures beneath him. Maria is the only figure in relative darkness, as even the tree seems brightly lit. This interplay of lighting creates a hierarchy. Light unites the men and the tree, highlighting their importance while Maria is relatively unimportant.

“The Elm-Tree” clearly displays Freeman's spiritual ecofeminism. A tree miraculously transforms David, demonstrating that nature is a powerful force at odds with gender, but also a powerful religious force. Freeman explores several issues in “The Elm-Tree,” among which is how aged masculinity fits within society and how nature alters this placement. David's brief stay in an elm tree allows him to step back from his masculine identity and frees him from societal expectations by reverting him to an affirmatively childlike state.

Reconnecting with Nature: “The White Birch”

The contrast between “The Elm-Tree” and the second story demonstrates that nature has many roles and can impact people in many positive ways. In contrast to David, the protagonist of “The White Birch” has never been severed from nature; he naturally turns to a tree for comfort and aid during a troubling time. This connection, however, marks him as more feminine than other men in his community. Marchalonis, who considers “The White Birch” the collection's “noticeable failure,” charges Freeman with sentimentality and anthropomorphism here:

Only here does she try to show Nature as comforter, describing the mutual comfort that comes to exist between a man bereft of family and love and a birch tree that has lost all her “sisters.” But to make her point Freeman must give the tree a limited consciousness. (“Another”)

However, Marchalonis neglects the other stories’ anthropomorphism—for instance, the consciousness of the elm, who lords it over his field. Freeman’s anthropomorphism does not undercut her ecological message, because it highlights the similarities between the human and non-human, rather than separating them further. “The White Birch” is not a failure; read through an ecofeminist lens, it successfully examines a man whom nature feminizes.

Freeman’s second story explores nature’s role as a comforter, minimizing the transformative element emphasized in “The Elm-Tree.” “The White Birch” revolves around Joseph Lynn, a middle-aged man who is planning to wed a much younger woman, Sarah Benton. The town respects Joseph, despite his solitary ways and his recent infatuation. Conversely, the townspeople think meanly of Sarah, whom they regard as a manipulative gold-digger for marrying Joseph, who “had his comfortable home, and income enough to almost keep her in luxury, or what meant luxury to a girl of her standing in life. People looked at her with a mixture of approval of her shrewdness and contempt” (Freeman 48). For his future wife, Joseph has agreed to move his house closer to the main road; the day of the move, Sarah’s other, younger suitor, arrives at the worksite to speak with Joseph. Youthful Harry Wyman is still struggling to get his financial footing; Sarah loves him, but is not sure about marrying him because he doesn’t have a steady job. When Harry tells Joseph that Sarah loves him more than she does

Joseph, Joseph immediately calls off the wedding and stops the workers from moving his house. As soon as everyone has left, Joseph heads out into his yard and sits leaning against a white birch tree. After some time with the tree, Joseph's heart lightens and his sorrow diminishes.

The second story's opening, which emphasizes family rather than individuality, diverges sharply from how "The Elm-Tree" begins; furthermore, Freeman does not highlight gender as strongly: "At one time the birch-tree had sisters, and they stood close together in sun and wind and rain, in winter and summer" (Freeman 43). Unlike the strong male presence that opens the first tale, "The Birch Tree" foregrounds family and links gender with loss:

But all her sisters were gone; one or two had died of themselves, the others had been lopped down by the woodsman, and there was only the one white birch left. She stood with the same inclination of her graceful trunk and limbs which she had had on account of her sisters, and which she never would have had except for them. She was a tree alone, but with the habit of one growing in the midst of a family. (Freeman 43-44)

Freeman suggests that family changes an individual, sometimes without that individual recognizing it, but she further intimates that women are somehow more deeply involved with family and that familial loss impacts them more profoundly. The clear femininity of "The White Birch" diverges remarkably from the powerful, almost overbearing masculinity of "The Elm-Tree." These opening paragraphs mark the disparities between male and female power. Juxtaposing these openings allows the author to affirm how male and female experiences of the natural environment differ.

Freeman closely associates Joseph with both femininity and the natural world. Until he falls in love with a foolish young woman, Joseph, who enjoys being “away from the windows of neighbors, and the rattle of wheels along the dusty road,” loves “the silent companionship of trees and fields, and had no wish for anything else” (Freeman 46-7). The villagers, and readers, admire his close relationship with the environment. Joseph’s connection to nature helps him, unlike his intended bride, avoid a life devoted to ensuring economic position.

While Freeman does not go so far as to cast her as a soulless gold-digger, Sarah Benton is certainly not worthy of Joseph. Freeman calls her “cheaply and inanely pretty; by some method known to love, and love alone, [Joseph] was blind to that element of commonness and unworthiness, and saw only in her the woman of his dreams” (47). Freeman emphasizes Sarah’s shallowness while also excusing Joseph for this strange attachment, making love responsible for his bad judgment.

Freeman, however, fully evokes Sarah’s uncomfortable position. The villagers regard Sarah as a “girl who knew how to feather her nest, and yet condemned her for being willing to give herself to a man old enough to be her father” (Freeman 48). No matter what she does, the villagers judge and mock her. Given the girl’s crass devotion to materialism, however, readers do not pity her. Societal expectations deeply confine and even harm Sarah, a theme that Freeman repeats elsewhere. Sarah, however, is not pitiable, because she is disconnected from nature and because her influence has upset Joseph’s own link. This bond with nature sets Joseph apart not just from Sarah but also from her preferred partner, Harry Wyman.

Freeman casts Harry as physically and psychically weak. When he first enters the story, he is “pale, both shamed and triumphant” (59). Yet, Joseph looks on the young man “with a kindly air” because he has “known the young fellow ever since he was a baby” (59). What’s more, Joseph does not view his rival with suspicion. Joseph had “never been jealous of him, although he had heard his name coupled with his sweetheart’s. He was not a jealous man, and believed in a promise as he believed in the return of the spring” (59). The contrast could not be stronger: Harry, completely divorced from nature, appears ill and weak; Joseph, strongly associated with nature, appears healthy and powerful. Even when Joseph learns that his fiancé would rather be with Harry, he does not lose all his power. His face turns “ghastly, but he [loses] not one atom of his stiffness of bearing. He was like a tree that even the winds of heaven could not bend” (60-61). When he releases Sarah, Joseph regains his original relationship with nature. Despite his sore heart, Freeman sees him as better off. When Joseph relinquishes his claim on Sarah, Harry leaves “with a leaping motion of joy” that contrasts with Joseph’s ponderousness (61). In all, Harry appears like a child, while Joseph acts like a wise adult. This contrast raises an important question: Why does Sarah prefer Harry to Joseph?

I suggest that Sarah likely severs her engagement because Joseph’s relationship to nature makes him more willing to assume feminine tasks, and hence more effeminate. Among his attractive qualities is the fact that his “house was very orderly. He had planned to do most of the housework himself after he was married, and save Sarah” (Freeman 63). Joseph is not the only *Six Trees* character to do domestic work; he is,

however, the first one we meet. His association with domesticity seems to be why he is not an acceptable suitor in Sarah's mind. In a sense he is too independent: he hardly even needs her. He is also too adaptable and malleable. Truly masculine men would not try to spare her so. While Freeman does not see Joseph as incomplete or unsuccessful, he clearly does not fit society's masculine expectations.

His openness to feminine tasks parallels his willingness to enter environment for solace and company, as when his engagement is broken off. Leaning against the "frail, swaying body" of the white birch, he feels "her silvery skin against his cheek, and all at once the dearness of that which is always left in the treasure-house of nature for those who are robbed came over him and satisfied him" (64). Joseph's respite him; no longer does he desire a woman who would marry him only to be financially comfortable. Instead, he revalues the companionship that the environment offers. The scene is deeply reminiscent of David's time in the elm tree. The lonely birch tree spiritually comforts Joseph. The story ends with their union, courtesy of the wind. As it moves over them both, "the tree did not fairly know that the wind was not stirring the leaves of her lost sisters, and the man's love and sense of primeval comfort were so great that he was still filled with the peace of possession" (Freeman 65). The scene is clearly meant to be read as a spiritual one. The tree and the man are joined, united in peaceful companionship—as dear and as close as a marriage.

The illustrator shows this scene, but does not fully capture the poignancy and importance of Joseph's time with the white birch tree. The final picture shows Joseph leaning against the birch. The illustration uses empty space strikingly; the image's bottom

half is empty and white. Joseph's torso, leaning against the tree, takes up the right third, while his legs stretch out into the middle third. He is smoking a pipe, his hat beside him; though the image does not fully capture Joseph's melancholy, it does convey his peacefulness and contentment. Running behind Joseph and occupying the top third is wild forest. Filled with many thin trunks, the background evokes nature without overwhelming the scene. Overall, the image focuses attention on Joseph, placing him centrally and allowing other details to fade into obscurity.

The tree's indistinctness elides the union that Freeman envisions. While she underscores how individual trees matter profusely—Joseph does not turn to any nearby tree for comfort, he turns to a very particular birch—the image relies on minimal detail. Joseph's hat is more detailed than the tree he leans against. To the illustrator, the scene's center is the man himself. Emphasizing Joseph also minimizes his unusual relationship with the tree. While the illustrator centers on humans, Freeman highlights the relationship between humans and nature.

Figure 4. Joseph and the white birch



Contrary to Marchalonis's claim that "The White Birch" is weak, the story may be the most revolutionary of Freeman's collection. She depicts a mutually beneficial relationship that develops between a human and nature. The birch tree obtains a surrogate family; Joseph gains a wife, if only in spiritual terms. Freeman's ecofeminist spirituality presents a clear alternative to unsatisfactory human relationships. Escaping a relationship propelled primarily by economics, Joseph reconnects to nature and revels in a spiritually satisfying relationship.

Reworking Gender: "The Great Pine"

Unlike Joseph's ideal relationship, "The Great Pine," reasserts human relationships, while still honoring a deep bond with nature. This story traces how a man spiritually inspired by nature can redeem himself by abandoning labor's gender distinctions. As in the previous two stories, Freeman focuses on male characters, nearly erasing women. This removal promotes a very specific effect. The protagonist does not distinguish between male and female roles; excluding women permits Freeman to depict the protagonist doing both masculine and feminine work. Paradoxically, excluding women offers Freeman the chance to fully articulate her ecofeminist spirituality.

"The Great Pine" begins pessimistically. Dick, a shiftless wanderer who had run away from his wife, baby daughter, and mother-in-law ten years earlier, "had wild blood in his veins" and he "had rebelled at the hard grind necessary to wrest a livelihood by himself from the mountain soil" (82). Now "portionless save for that with which he came into the world, except for two garments which were nearly past their use as such" (Freeman 72) and "weary of wrong-doing and its hard wages" (Freeman 82), Dick returns

home. As he journeys, he encounters a great pine tree; after becoming lost and returning to the tree three times, Dick tries to set it on fire. As he leaves the pine a fourth time, he reconsiders his actions and returns to save it. This decision changes his life's course. He quickly finds his way home; when he arrives, he learns that his wife has remarried, thinking him dead. She has since died, leaving four children and a terminally ill second husband. Dick does not rage against his fate; instead, he settles into a new life of hard work. He uncomplainingly cares for his daughter and his wife's second family, his selflessness surprises those who learn about his generosity and dutifulness.

At the story's conclusion, Dick learns that the great pine that so transformed him has fallen in a storm, leaving him the only character in Freeman's collection who has to live without the tree that inspired him. "The Great Pine" depicts a tree that motivates a man to reorganize his life. A pauper who had abandoned his family, Dick finds himself utterly transformed: by extinguishing the fire he has set, "for the first time in his history...[he becomes] superior to his own life" and gains "a greater spiritual growth than the tree had gained in height since it first quickened with life" (Freeman 79). The tree stimulates him to become a better man. Here, that better man not only returns home, he assumes responsibility for another man and his children and accepts normatively masculine and feminine tasks.

Freeman ties voice and time to ecofeminism in this tale. Paralleling the previous two stories, "The Great Pine" opens with the tree, but rather than offering a physical account, Freeman describes the tree's voice and its ability to warp time:

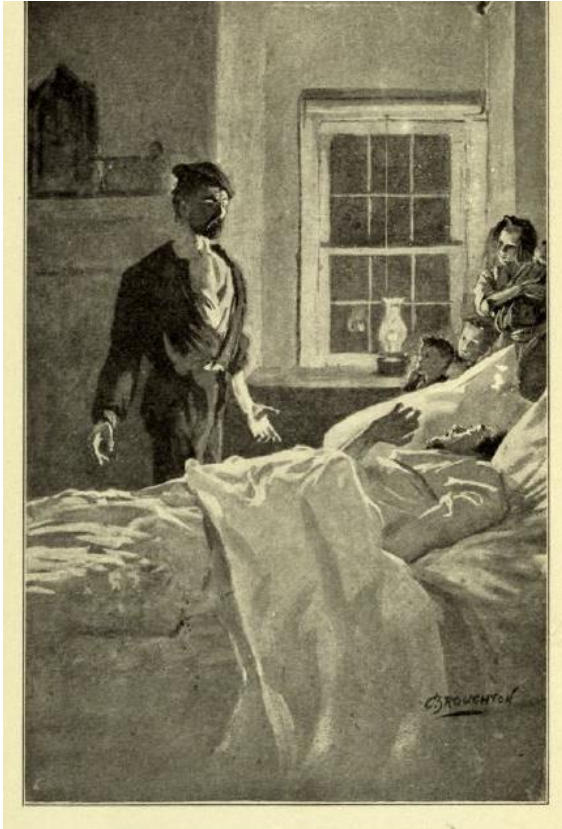
It was in the summer-time that the great pine sang his loudest song of winter, for always the voice of the tree seemed to arouse in the listener a realization of that which was past and to come, rather than of the present. (69)

This concentration on the masculine voice and on time echoes throughout the story.

Encountering the pine removes people from the present, miraculously placing them either in the past or the future. The tree's unique involvement in temporality marks it as particularly powerful and unusual. Indeed, its close association with the past and the future contrasts deeply with Dick, who, when introduced, remains firmly tied to the present moment. The pine's ability to remove people from time marks it as otherworldly, similarly to the elm tree. By moving people through seasons anachronistically, the pine helps them escape gendered norms. Dick is no different, though the tree's effects do not manifest immediately.

Freeman describes Dick, unnamed initially, in singularly negative ways. Freeman writes that the "man who lay beneath the tree had much uncultivated imagination, and, though hampered by exceeding ignorance, he yet saw and heard that which was beyond mere observation" (70). Dick differs from the heroic male characters that precede him; his only redeeming quality seems to be his openness to nature. He can hear the tree's song, but he does not understand it yet. As Dick contemplates winter, sitting beneath the tree, he does not realize that these thoughts are "the voice of the tree and not his own thought, so did the personality of the great pine mingle with his own" (Freeman 70-71). For the first time, Freeman shows a man and a tree communicating, suggesting that she considers this relationship special and different than those she depicts in the earlier stories.

Figure 5. Frontispiece



The pine inspires Dick to quite new spiritual heights. Saving it utterly transforms him, as Freeman underscores with several pressing questions:

Who shall determine the limit at which the intimate connection and reciprocal influence of all forms of visible creation upon one another may stop? A man may cut down a tree and plant one. Who knows what effect the tree may have upon the man, to his raising or undoing? (79-80)

These questions emphasize the masculine noun. Even as she shows that nature changes both men and women, she sees that their time among trees more deeply

impacts—or perhaps more wholly transforms—men. Freeman does not ask similar rhetorical questions about her female characters. Dick is singular; his connection to the pine, and the changes it sparks, is the collection's deepest and most unexpected. Dick must use his alteration to overcome the tragedy he finds when he returns to his old home.

Dick's reunion with his surviving family members serves as the frontispiece for the collection. The image features an obviously distressed man standing over a bed; the bed contains a second man, who is contorted and tense—indeed, he looks as if he is dying from some painful disease. Crouched in the corner are four children: a young boy, a young girl, and a slightly older girl who clutches a baby. The older girl is Dick's only

surviving family member (Freeman 81), while the other three children are from his wife's second marriage (89-90). The decrepit man, her second husband, is slowly dying of consumption.

A scene from "The Great Pine" makes for a particularly odd frontispiece. Indeed, if we take the frontispiece's subject as the collection's true topic, we would expect several slightly menacing, overwrought stories. In any other context, we might assume that the man on the bed has kidnapped—perhaps even murdered—the wife in question and that the standing figure—presumably the husband—has come to either retrieve her or exact revenge. The choice to make this the frontispiece is confounding. The image sets up confusing expectations and suggests misleading themes. Freeman writes about nature and humans; this image suggests that the stories are instead about men and their women. It is a well-drawn, effective image; however, it not only misinterprets the story's tone, it also misconstrues the entire collection's themes. Dick's reaction to his wife's fate emphasizes the image's inappropriateness. Indeed, the illustration's unsuitability hints at why ecocritics have neglected Freeman. The illustration recapitulates Freeman's positioning as a writer of melodramatic romances. This particular image undercuts *Six Trees*'s ecofeminism, and minimizes Freeman's environmentalism.

Rather than ejecting the usurping husband and his children, Dick starts to work. Without a single murmur, he begins toiling for his own daughter, as well as his wife's second family, the consumptive and his three children (Freeman 90). Dick's laboring ability makes him superhuman: "It was inconceivable how much the man accomplished. He developed an enormous capacity for work" (Freeman 97). Dick's time with the pine

tree has transformed him from a shiftless vagabond to a heroic laborer whose generosity includes people outside his family. He has no duty to help the man who replaced him; indeed, when the doctor who treats the sick man learns that Dick is going to nurse him, he stares, “as one stares who sees a good deed in a naughty world, with a mixture of awe, of contempt, and of incredulity” (Freeman 97). Dick does not seem to mind for whom he toils, so long as he has meaningful work.

His “enormous capacity for work” includes various traditionally feminine as well as masculine tasks. For instance, “[a]fter supper” the first night he is home, “Dick cleaned the kitchen. He also tidied up the other room and made the bed, and milked, and split some wood wherewith to cook breakfast” (Freeman 94). His capacity for feminine work continues to grow the longer he works. He washes and irons “like a woman,” he cooks, cleans, and nurses (Freeman 96, 95, 97). Dick also performs typically masculine work, cutting wood to raise money for the family, planting a hay field and a garden, and improving the house (Freeman 96, 97). His efforts to enhance life for this nontraditional family mean that when winter arrives, they are again thriving. Freeman makes her political point: men can do the household chores just as well as women. However, to challenge gender duties, men have to be connected to the environment.

Dick’s transformation assumes even more poignancy when we learn that the tree that changed his life has died. After a particularly violent storm, he discovers that the “great pine [has] fallen from his high estate...the storm had killed him. He lay prostrate on the mountain” (Freeman 98-99). This realization situates him uniquely within *Six Trees*, for the great pine is the only tree to die and Dick is the only character who has to

maintain his transformation without a tree's enduring aid. The story ends with him riding home, leaving the pine behind. Freeman's ambivalent ending leaves her readers wondering whether or not her hero will be able to continue working as hard as he has without the tree's mentorship.

Dick's transformation is the collection's most comprehensive and most unusual. Not only does he combine feminine and masculine roles, he must maintain his new work ethic even after the inspiring pine has died. While other characters preserve a close connection to the trees that influenced them, Dick cannot, and his future remains correspondingly uncertain. Freeman invites readers to ask questions about Dick's fate: Will he be able to sustain his current work-pace? Will he continue to care for his unusual family? The answers to these questions remain uncertain. Freeman's ecofeminism—her strong belief in nature's profound power—suggests her hope for Dick. Without the author's unequivocal faith in nature, as the previous stories indicate, Dick's future would be uncertain.

Redefining Family: "The Balsam Fir"

Freeman does not conclude the collection with such uncertainty; she turns to women's very different experiences. Martha and Sarah, strong women who stage their own rebellions, demonstrate that women are less free and less able to subvert gender expectations than the men in the previous stories. More oppressed and confined, women cannot achieve the same heights, because they begin from a lower point. Freeman shows how their attempts to change their own lives are therefore more profound than men's transformations.

“The Balsam Fir” focuses exclusively and discouragingly on female experience. Freeman depicts how communities’ gender expectations constrain women profoundly. As Freeman tells their stories, she shows that even connecting to nature becomes a rebellious act; stealing a moment with nature implies they neglect other, feminine duties. However, “The Balsam Fir” shows that women who bond with nature can assert themselves and change their lives.

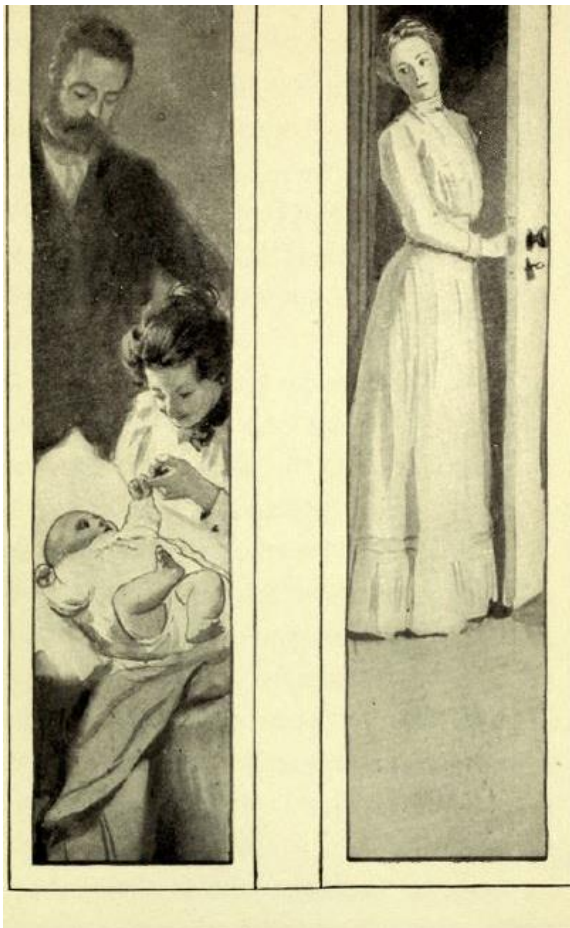
Initially, this story seems unlikely to promote rebellion, for “The Balsam Fir” features a lonely spinster. Life and especially her sister have thwarted Martha Elder. Adeline, “ten years after her father’s death,” married “the man who everybody had thought would marry Martha”; rather than raising a ruckus, Martha “had made a pretty wedding for her, and people had said Martha did not care, after all; that she was cut out for an old maid; that she did not want to marry” (Freeman 105). Now, she resides alone in the family home, miles from anyone, living comfortably within her means. Even her sister and her husband visiting with their first baby do not ruffle Martha’s calm. One Christmas, she finally gives voice to her rebellious longings. Her deaf friend Abby, who is spending Christmas with Martha, becomes her confidant (despite her inability to hear anything that Martha confesses). As Martha relays her unhappiness, a man walks onto her land searching for a Christmas tree. Martha, who rushes to the fir tree’s rescue, surprising the woodsman and expelling him from the yard. Defending the tree changes her; she finds courage and invites Abby into her household permanently. A much happier and more peaceful Martha enjoys Christmas and imagines a happy future with her new “family.”

Unlike the previous three stories, "The Balsam Fir" does not begin with a tree, but with the story's protagonist: "Martha Elder had lived alone for years on Amesboro road, a mile from the nearest neighbor, three miles from the village" (Freeman 103). Emphasizing Martha's isolation and loneliness, Freeman next describes how Martha has been separated from her community. Moreover, not only is she poor, she is an old maid. Her sister is little help; Adeline is petty and coarse. Martha is "much prettier than her younger sister Adeline" (Freeman 106). However, "the very fineness of" Martha's femininity "and its perfection" makes her appearance "repellent" to her neighbors (Freeman 106). Freeman's meaning remains strikingly obscure. Is she commenting on society's impossible standards? Society demands that women be perfect, but when confronted with such a perfect woman, they avoid her. Perhaps Freeman is suggesting that women are subject to overwhelming control. Unable to shake her reputation as a ideal woman, Martha cannot have her own life. Regardless, her extremity makes her different. Freeman may suggest that only women who are somehow already outside society can rebel. Martha, whom the townspeople ostracized because of her femininity and her spinsterism, can rebel and save her tree because society's expectations have failed her. Freeman emphasizes Martha's awkward position by contrasting her with her sister. Adeline, unlike Martha, "with her coarse bloom and loud laugh and ready stare, had always had admirers by the score" (Freeman 106). Imbuing Adeline with just a pinch of masculinity allows Freeman to suggest that society prefers a woman who has just enough femininity.

The first illustration highlights the contrast and unbridgeable divide between the two women. The illustration differs stylistically from the others in the collection. The image is divided into two different panels, each featuring a different scene. On the left, we see Adeline playing with her baby as her husband stands behind them. On the right, Martha stands in an open door. Her face is tilted towards her right, which makes her seem to be looking longingly towards her sister. The image is the only unsigned one in the collection, which, coupled with the odd frames around each image, suggests that someone might have doctored it. Readers inevitably wonder what has been eliminated

from the middle section.

Figure 6. Adeline and Martha



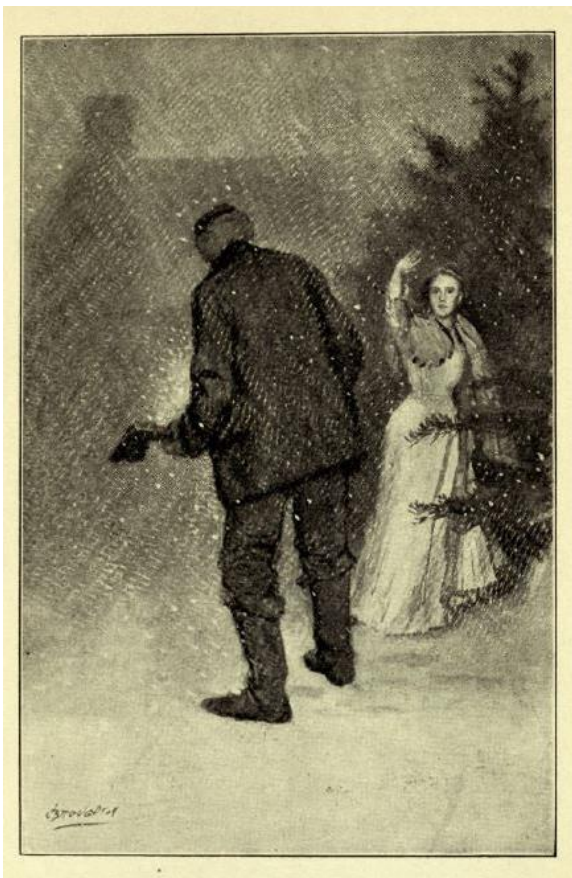
The artificial lines highlight the women's differences. Adeline has round, almost childlike cheeks; her baby dominates the picture. Her husband fades into the background; the artist emphasizes the baby, who is central to Adeline's world; her husband cannot compete. The arrangement fits Adeline's selfish and oblivious character. Martha, on the other hand, dominates her frame. She is dressed all in white, which, coupled with her pale face and hair, makes her appear ghostly. Her place in the doorway functions

symbolically: her chances at a family like Adeline's have passed. That door is closed to her; she must pass on to other things. While the image captures the extreme contrast between Adeline and Martha, because it eschews all nature it underscores the story's purely human element, rather than, as Freeman intends, the relationship between Martha and nature.

Despite her difficult and lonely life, Martha has not been defeated. Indeed, Freeman emphasizes that Martha's rebelliousness, which eventually emerges, has been a long time coming. For instance, Martha's poverty invokes "a no less strong, though unexpressed, spirit of rebellion against the smallness of her dole of the good things of life" (Freeman 104). The author is well aware that many social rules limit Martha. She must suffer in silence because her avenues of expression are sharply limited. Her neighbors see her as a gentle, quiet spinster because she contains her unhappiness. No one who knows Martha sees "the fierce tension of her nerves as she sat at her window sewing...nobody dreamed what revolt that little cottage roof...sometimes sheltered" (Freeman 109). Martha's later quite vocal and obvious rebellion shocks those around her, but if people truly knew her, her stand would not be surprising. Indeed, social conventions have so confined and thwarted Martha that her neighbors ought to expect an eventual explosion. When Martha's rebellious explosion does occur, it changes her life.

When confronted with a situation that requires unwomanly behavior, Martha jumps at her chance, using masculine authority to impetuously save the balsam from a man's ax. Society connects Martha's loneliness to her perceived failure to attract a suitor and produce children. She has not been a successful woman, even if she has completely

Figure 7. Martha protects the balsam fir



upheld society's gendered expectations for domesticity. When a woodsman approaches the fir in her yard, she makes the masculine decision to run from her house and snatch away his ax with "such an unexpected motion" that he yields. She brandishes the ax and threatens him, yelling, "If you dare come one step nearer my tree, I'll kill you" (Freeman 120). Her threat is most likely impossible to enact, but her bravery emerges clearly. Rather than accepting the woodsman's intentions, Martha changes her life because she assumes agency.

The illustration captures Martha's spiritual strength in this moment, illustrating her rebellious protection of her tree. Martha stands close to the balsam—the tree's boughs almost seem to swallow her. She wears all white, emphasizing her otherworldliness. One arm is raised, in a gesture that demands the man stop. The man stands in the foreground,

his back to us. He holds an ax menacingly; he looks as if he might attack Martha rather than chop down a tree. A shadowy house appears in the background. Because Martha wears white, she instantly becomes the focus. The image creates a clear contrast between good (Martha in white) and evil (the man in black). While Freeman does not include this undertone, the image clearly captures her point. Those who would cut down a tree for mindless pleasure are wrong, perhaps evil. Nature can bring comfort; it can inspire and placate. These abilities cast nature as good. The illustration captures Freeman's spiritual undertone, creating a powerful subtext that helps explain Martha's profound power.

While Martha's defense of the balsam is unusual, Freeman uses it to prove her strength. Never before has she had the strength to escape society's expectations. This opportunity allows her to seize the chance to rewrite her future. At first blush, Martha's rebellion seems ill-fated and extremely limited. Indeed, casting her rebellion in purely emotional terms almost encourages this reading. She saves the tree from the woodsman's ax because she feels that "she would have been killed herself rather than have the tree harmed...She felt suddenly as if the tree were alive. A great, protective tenderness for it came over her" (Freeman 122). However, Martha's insistence on possession hints at Freeman's deeper ecofeminist argument.

Martha understands the tree as important as any human. Her rebellion is subtly complex, because she connects to her tree differently than the male characters. Martha understands the tree as a fellow being who deserves protection. She extends her untapped maternal instinct to the tree, defending it as one might protect a child. It is only after defending the fir that Martha makes the decision to reorganize her household. Choosing

to shelter her needy friend Abby changes Martha's future. Finally able to shed her label as a lonely spinster, she now has her own, self-authorized family.

However, Martha's new family is subtly rebellious. While she does not fully embrace masculine power, which could help her escape her lonely and confined life, she does what she can with her limited female agency. Freeman demonstrates that women are just as receptive as men to the natural environment, but society's expectations limit them more thoroughly. For them to defy society, the circumstances must be exceptional. Ostracized because she fits feminine expectations too thoroughly, Martha revolts as well as she can. When she saves the balsam fir and invites a companion to share her house, she finally claims agency. The tree changes her perspective, from that of a lonely, sad spinster, to a happy, independent woman with agency. Luscher argues that by the end, Martha is "not lost in illusion but rather able to confront these conditions less alone, and with a greater sense of personal wholeness" (374), but he seems to see Martha's rebellion as incomplete. Her rebellion seems to have made her complacent. This view denies just how thoroughly Martha changes her life. Viewing her future home life as complacency denies just how confined Martha was, how little room she actually had to change her world. Given her extremely narrow world, Martha has reordered her life heroically.

Martha contrasts sharply with the male characters that precede her. Indeed, Freeman's ecofeminist argument here seems different. She does not combine masculine and feminine work, like Joseph and Dick, nor does she escape gendered work entirely, like David. Instead, Martha fashions a slightly happier home for herself and the story ends much as it began. Freeman offers a troublingly pessimistic perspective on female

rebellion. She suggests that, while women can escape gender expectations, men have more freedom to do so. Freeman also sees a greater separation between women and the environment. Women can rarely enjoy natural spaces or avoid gendered spaces.

However, the environment can spiritually inspire women without them actually having to physically connect with it, which sets them apart from men. Martha's brief connection to nature allows her to assert herself and claim agency.

Rebuilding Family: "The Lombardy Poplar"

"The Lombardy Poplar" similarly introduces a woman whose connection to the environment helps her escape a repressed life. Freeman's second female-centric story also depicts a community and family that limit a spinster, but minor differences distinguish it from "The Balsam Fir". For instance, the protagonist does not make a grand stand; indeed, her connection to nature is among the collection's subtlest. She does not redirect her maternal instincts towards a tree to restructure her life but rather uses her connection to nature to expand her agency. In all, "The Lombardy Poplar" displays a particularly understated ecofeminist spirituality.

Continuing Freeman's emphasis on how females experience nature, "The Lombardy Poplar" depicts Sarah Dunn, an elderly spinster. Sarah is the last surviving member of her immediate family; everyone, including her twin sister, has succumbed to consumption. Sarah's only companion is her second cousin, a woman also named Sarah Dunn, who comes "regularly on Thursday afternoons, stay[s] to tea, and [goes] to the evening prayer-meeting" (Freeman 133). The women are remarkable because they share more than a name:

They were of about the same age; they both had gray-blond hair, which was very thin, and strained painfully back from their ears and necks into tiny rosettes at the backs of their heads, below little, black lace caps trimmed with bows of purple ribbon...The resemblance was so absolute as to produce a feeling of something at fault in the beholder. (Freeman 134)

The cousins seem identical, until one day when the Lombardy poplar in Sarah's front yard comes under scrutiny. When Sarah expresses her admiration for and companionship with the tree, Cousin Sarah chides and mocks her. Eventually this one point becomes an insurmountable barrier and the two separate. Sarah arrives to prayer-meeting one week dressed differently from her cousin and afterwards invites her over for tea. From that moment, Sarah becomes the duo's more powerful, independent character, and the story ends with their awkward and tenuous reunion.

Again, Freeman genders the tree. Despite the poplar's place as the last surviving family member, Freeman emphasizes his individuality. Freeman opens by observing that the Lombardy poplar "had stood before the Dunn house in a lusty row of three brothers and a mighty father, from whose strong roots, extending far under the soil, they had all sprung" (Freeman 131). The emphasis on males contrasts sharply with Freeman's other tree families. The white birch, for instance, was among sisters, but gendering this tree as male suggests a different aspect to family. Joseph goes to a female white birch for comfort, but Sarah turns to a male poplar for strength. Rather than accentuating the tree's loneliness, as she does for the female white birch, Freeman sets the poplar apart from other trees, casting him as unique, masculine, and strong:

[He is] head and shoulders above the other trees—the cherry and horsechestnuts in the square front yard behind him...He seldom made any sound with his closely

massed foliage, and it required a mighty and concentrated gust of wind to sway him ever so little from his straight perpendicular. (Freeman 131-132)

The poplar seems particularly durable and differs markedly from the other trees. Unlike the great pine, he will weather any storm. Freeman closely connects the poplar and Sarah to emphasize their parallel lives: “As the tree was the last of his immediate family, so the woman who lived in the house was the last of hers” (132). This connection shows that Sarah’s independence is possible. If this tree can live without its family, then so can Sarah, if she must. The poplar’s presence allows Sarah to distinguish herself from her only surviving relative, who does not comfort so much as tyrannize her. Furthermore, their opposing views on the Lombardy poplar explicitly distinguishes the Sarahs.

Sarah sees trees much as Martha in “The Balsam Fir” does: they serve as close companions and surrogate families. Speaking to her cousin, she says, “‘Speakin’ of losin’ folks...you ‘ain’t any idea what a blessin’ that popple-tree out there has been to me, especially since Marah [her twin sister] died’” (Freeman 144). Much like the men in Freeman’s other stories, Sarah sees how the natural world can provide solace. Even more strikingly, she understands that her cousin sees things differently. Cousin Sarah would never take solace from a tree, and when Cousin Sarah makes this clear, Sarah says that she’s “‘seen that popple there ever since I can remember, and it’s all I’ve got left that’s anyways alive, and it seems like my own folks, and I can’t help it’” (Freeman 145). Early on, Sarah distinguishes herself from her cousin. In reality, she does have a living relative—but because her cousin is so closed off to nature, she feels that she has no one.

Cousin Sarah does not see Lombardy trees as comforting or even attractive.

Instead, she believes that they inspire aberrant, rebellious feelings:

“Well,” said she, “if you can feel as if an old popple-tree made up to you, in any fashion, for the loss of your own folks, and if you can feel as if it was them, all I’ve got to say is, I can’t...It seems to me as if it was almost sacrilegious.”
(Freeman 145-146)

Cousin Sarah clearly divides humans and nature, contending that trees cannot provide what living humans can. For a person to think this way appears sinful. However, Sarah’s choice of tree also scandalizes Cousin Sarah. “‘I’ve always thought,’” says Cousin Sarah, “‘a popple was about the homeliest tree that grows...I was thankful when I got mine cut down’” (Freeman 146-147). Interestingly, she had her own Lombardy poplar because it brought her neither strength nor comfort. Instead, it annoyed her and she disliked it. Freeman uses this disparity to distinguish between the two Sarahs.

Cousin Sarah only values nature when it can offer something tangible. She tells Sarah that Lombardy poplars are useless because they “‘don’t give no shade worth anything; don’t seem to have much to do with the earth and folks, anyhow’” (Freeman 146-147). While she offers an atypical economic argument, the undertones are clear. Cousin Sarah wants productive trees; she cannot abide an impractical tree because exists independently of human value systems. She only exempts a tree from practical worth if it has aesthetic appeal: “‘[I]f I was goin’ to make such a fuss over a tree I’d have taken something different from a popple. I’d have taken a pretty elm or a maple’” (Freeman 147). In the same breath, she draws attention to the Lombardy poplar’s foreignness and tries to force Sarah to be conventional. The Lombardy poplar is an unusual choice for

favorite tree; imported from Italy, the trees have short lifespans and, in America, are primarily used as windbreaks (Elias 468). As an interesting side note, “only male trees are known, and these are propagated by cuttings” (Elias 468). Whether Freeman knew this detail or not, it appears striking in a spinster’s story.

Because Sarah praises a peculiar tree, her cousin tries to change her preferences. If she is going to insist on admiring trees, then she must choose ones acceptable to Cousin Sarah. A Lombardy poplar is inappropriate because, as Cousin Sarah claims, the poplar “‘ain’t a tree. It’s a stick tryin’ to look like one” (Freeman 147). Cousin Sarah regards Sarah’s attempt to assert her own individuality not as rebellious admiration for an unusual tree but as a mulish disregard for what’s appropriate. Cousin Sarah’s utter disregard for Sarah’s personal opinion, coupled with her disregard for trees, propels the latter to her rebellion.

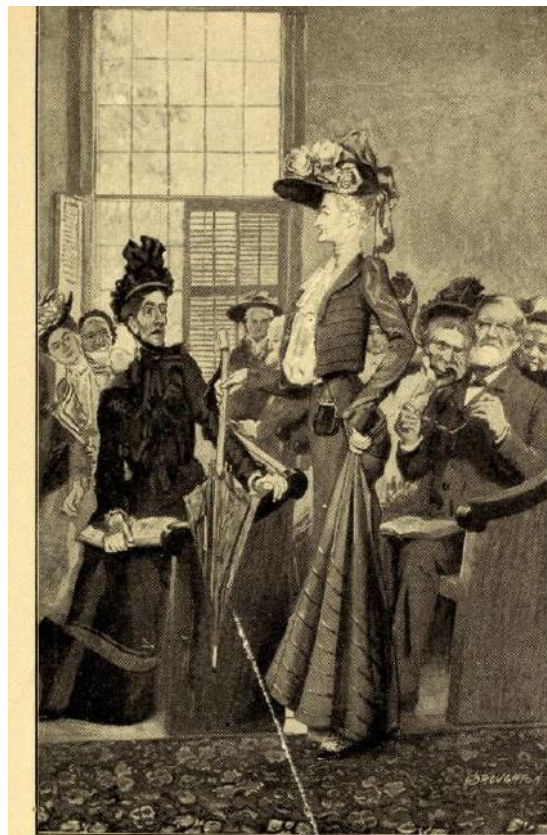
Sarah realizes that she, like the Lombardy poplar, deserves to be independent and individual and she tells her cousin that she’s “‘sick of things and folks that are just like everything and everybody else. I’m sick of trees that are just trees. I like one that ain’t” (Freeman 148-149). Sarah asserts her decision-making ability, completely separate from her cousin’s expectations. Cousin Sarah cannot abide Sarah’s individuality, and breaks with her. This is apparently the first time Sarah has asserted her independence. A “neighbor of an energetic and independent turn” one day asks Sarah as she walks with her cousin, “‘For the Lord’s sake, Sarah Dunn, ’ain’t you got any mind of your own?” (Freeman 137). Sarah can barely respond; she looks “at her cousin before replying,” but offers no defense. Fellow humans cannot encourage Sarah to rebel. It takes something

outside of humanity—an unloved, disrespected tree—to get her to rebel. Following the tree’s example rather than to listening to a human neighbor, Sarah transforms differently than other characters in the collection. Indeed, that Sarah manages to rebel at all is surprising, given her cousin’s overwhelming influence.

Rather than implicitly commenting on spirituality, as she did in “The Balsam Fir,” Freeman here directly remarks on religion. The extent of Sarah’s rebellion becomes clearest in a church. Visibly asserting her individuality, Sarah wears “a gown of dark-red silk and a bonnet tufted with pink roses, holding aloft a red parasol” (Freeman 164). Unavoidable—indeed, almost a target—Sarah stands out for the first time, all because she “sacrilegiously” identifies with a tree. An

illustration captures this scene’s importance, even though it does not include any obvious references to nature. Sarah stands next to a pew, flaunting her stylish clothes. Her cousin sits near her, dressed in her typical demure black. While Sarah’s face is brightly lit, Cousin Sarah’s face is darker. Furthermore, Cousin Sarah’s face seems caricatured: her nose is huge, her mouth almost looks like it is melting, her eyes are sunken and large. Sarah’s face appears more delicately

Figure 8. Sarah debuts her new dress



drawn, even though she has a long, sharp nose and a sharp, protruding chin. The cousins demand attention; the crowd that surrounds them faces the two women, staring. Through the window in the background, the barest hint of a tree appears, which reminds us how Sarah's rebellion originates.

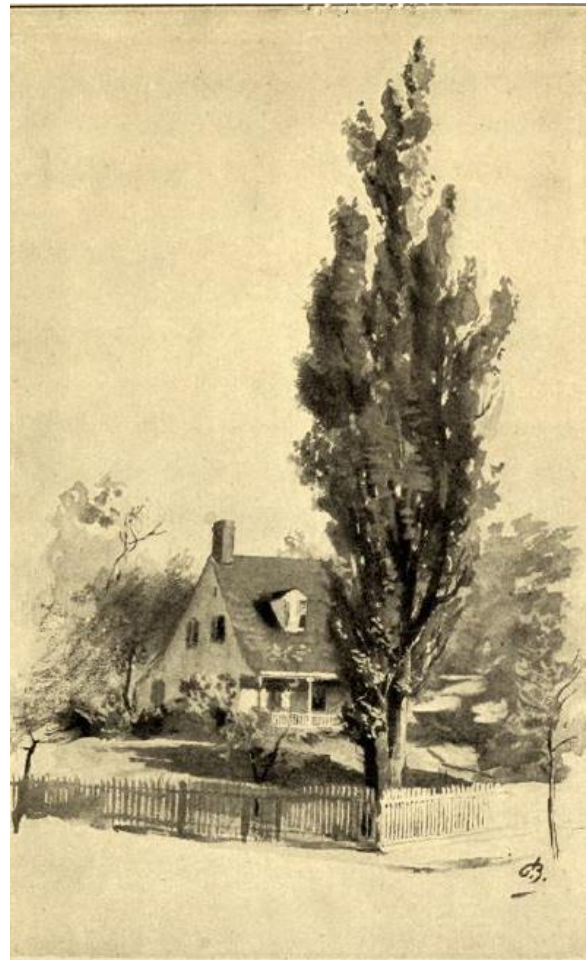
Sarah occupies the image's center, as the lighting, placement, and characters' size emphasize. Much like the illustration of Martha in "The Balsam Fir," this illustration contrasts Sarah's paleness with everyone else—especially her cousin, who is in black like the woodsman. The image also recalls the clear spiritual tones of David in the elm tree. Sarah, well-lit by her inner spiritual power, becomes an icon. She is as proud, as tall, and as solitary as the Lombardy poplar that fills her yard. The story concludes with an image of the poplar, and the connections between it and Sarah emerge clearly.

The final image shows the Dunn homestead, but the Lombardy poplar features much more prominently. Standing tall and alone, the poplar seems almost as strong and unique as the elm that opened the collection. The illustrator seemingly modelled this image on the preceding image of Sarah, which demonstrates their parallel lives. Both individuals have been severed from their families and reclaim their individuality in order to survive. While the illustration shows nature that has been contained—after all, human-made objects, such as the house and the fence, completely surround the tree, which might undermine Freeman's environmental point—affirming its solitary strength reasserts the

tree's power. Nature is still clearly dominant, even when humanity entirely surrounds it. The narrative's conclusion reiterates the tree's importance as a role model. Freeman's collection shows us that trees make for powerful mentors, but this story makes her ecofeminist argument particularly clear: women who connect to their natural environments can access a force that helps them rebel against gender expectations and replace outmoded, traditional religion with a new spirituality.

Placing "The Lombardy Poplar" beside "The Balsam Fir" invites comparisons. Martha makes a grand stand and reorganizes her household. Sarah, in contrast, makes a seemingly innocuous remark which ultimately sparks her rather sudden rejection of her cousin's norms. Martha's rebellion seems less powerful, simply because she seemingly settles back into complacency. Her new family is an unusual one, so in reality she has achieved quite a lot. Sarah, in contrast, seemingly stages a much quieter rebellion but enjoys a much grander end. Through these two women, Freeman illustrates just how difficult it is for women to rebel and just how inconsequential those rebellions may seem to outsiders. To consider

Figure 9. The Lombardy poplar



one woman successful and the other a failure misses the larger point: society confines women, making their ability to escape gender expectations almost impossible.

Reimagining Poverty: “The Apple-Tree”

Freeman’s ecofeminist argument climaxes in the collection’s final story, which demonstrates not only how men are free to live outside societal expectations but also shows what happens when people separate themselves from nature. “The Apple Tree” stands out as the collection’s most overtly philosophical story. Rather than centering on specific people or trees, as she has done previously, Freeman focuses on how two families’ relationships to nature differ. Freeman also casts a woman as the antagonist, which seems to cast a doubt on her ecofeminism, but in “The Apple-Tree” she combats a materialistic and essentialist view of nature rather than exploring how men and women’s roles differ. Though the male protagonist ignores the difference between male and female work, his true strength is seeing nature as intrinsically valuable for its spiritual influence, rather than its economic benefits.

“The Apple-Tree” revolves around the Maddoxes and the Blakes. The former are the poorest people in town; pitiable, contemptible, and suspicious, they live outside normal societal boundaries. Seemingly their only redeeming quality is the beautiful apple-tree that occupies their front yard. The Blakes, on the other hand, are prototypically comfortable community members who rigidly follow society’s expectations. The story occurs during one day, as Sarah Blake completes her spring cleaning, oftentimes despite her husband’s clumsiness. Edison Blake is a gentle, quiet soul who bends to his wife’s demands; on this day, though, Sam Maddox and Edison stage a small rebellion to help

Edison escape work and Sarah struggles to clean alone. She cajoles and threatens Sam into helping (though he refuses to work for money), until finally the day concludes when the work is completed. The story ends with the Maddoxes contentedly gazing at their apple-tree.

The story opens not with the apple tree but with the protagonist's house: "Sam Maddox's house was like a glaring blot on the tidy New England landscape, for the very landscape had been made to bear evidence to the character of the dwellers upon the soil" (Freeman 171). Freeman's first sentence offers a new interest: class. Rather than highlighting the interactions between gender and nature, "The Apple Tree" illuminates how economics and nature interact. Luscher's analysis suggests that "the reader who seeks the depiction of a completely realized communion with nature will find it in" this story (368). However, he does not examine how abject impoverishment and nature interact. The Maddox home stands "unpainted since it was built," "with the sordid waste of poverty in shameless evidence around it on all sides" (Freeman 171, 172). While they are only slightly poorer than the other characters, the Maddoxes are more comfortable with their destitution. All the other characters hide their want or do their best to escape it through incessant hard labor.

Emblematizing his family, Sam Maddox has withdrawn from this puritanical system by refusing to work to overcome his privation. Rather than collect human riches, the Maddoxes revel in natural wealth. The apple tree is their crown jewel: "There was never a more beautiful apple-tree" than the Maddox's and the sight of it serves "as a solace to" the "very soul" of any passersby, "and beauty and the hope of the resurrection

would vanquish the squalor and the despair of humanity” (Freeman 173). The apple tree elevates the poverty-blighted yard to a spiritual place. The tree and its beauty also help the Maddoxes ignore their poverty.

Flourishing in such a wretched yard, Freeman’s tree indicates that the Maddoxes are attuned to the environment, which has isolated them from their neighbors. The Maddox children have “become in a certain sense a part of the soil, as much as the weeds and flowers of the spring” (Freeman 175). The close association between the children and the earth sets them apart. Indeed, the only other children appear in “The Great pine”; though Dick’s hard work elevates those children, the story does not foreground them. Here Freeman lavishes attention on children, seemingly because they are more “natural” than adults. The unusually close association between the young Maddoxes and the natural environment means that “[t]here was very little strife and dissension among” them “in spite of their ill-repute and general poverty and wretchedness” (Freeman 175). Children, Freeman advises, ought to inhabit the outdoors. Those in “The Great Pine” are sickly indoor creatures. Freeman depicts outdoor children as healthy and well-behaved, suggesting that when the natural environment collaborates in rearing children, they become better people.

However, the children are not the only unusual Maddox family members. The whole family is completely removed from conventional social concerns:

[They were] pariahs, suspected of all sorts of minor iniquities, but in reality they were a gentle, docile tribe, whose gentleness and docility were the causes of most of their failures of life. Sam Maddox and his brood, lacking that of comfort and necessities which they saw their neighbors possess, never thought of complaining or grasping for the sweets on the boughs behind their wall of fate. They settled

back unquestioningly on the soft side of their poverty, and slept, and smiled, and were not unhappy. (Freeman 176)

The connection between this family and the environment has freed them from society's problems. They survive, barely, on what they can gather from their local environment or from their neighbors, but ask for nothing. They accept what their neighbors give them and are happy with the little they get. Though poor, they transcend their neighbors' economic struggles.

Freeman suggests that Sam's close link to nature has generated a distinctly nonhuman intelligence. During an interaction with Sarah Blake, his shrewish neighbor, Sam looks "at her with the perplexed stare of a good-natured dog trying with the limitations of his doghood to comprehend a problem of humanity" (Freeman 192). While we could easily call Sam an idiot, that misses Freeman's point. Sam's intelligence simply differs from typical human intelligence, a trait the author honors rather than mocks. Rather than forcing himself or his wants onto the environment, Sam coexists. His passive approach to life places him outside the gendered system. Sam is so separate from society's monetary concerns that when Sarah Blake offers him money to help her, he becomes deeply offended:

"I ain't workin'," said Sam Maddox

"Mebbe you think we can't pay enough. I guess we can pay as much as your work is wuth, Sam Maddox. We ain't in the poor-house yet."

"I ain't workin'."

"He means he don't do no work for money. Don't you, Sam?" inquired Adeline [Sam's wife], tearfully. The baby whimpered, and she dandled it with no enthusiasm.

“He won't work for pay?” inquired Sarah Blake, dazedly.

“I don't shake mats for old women for no pay,” said Sam Maddox, with who could tell what species of inborn pride or generosity? (Freeman 194-95)

Sam is willing to work, but he refuses to do so for money. Freeman suggests there is something more honest and natural in the Maddox's poverty than in any attempt to change it. Significantly, Sam helps with housework, work typically reserved for women (Freeman 205). He finds all work equally distasteful; thus, women's tasks are just as bad as men's work. As seen throughout the collection, men connected to the environment are willing to overcome traditional gender divisions.

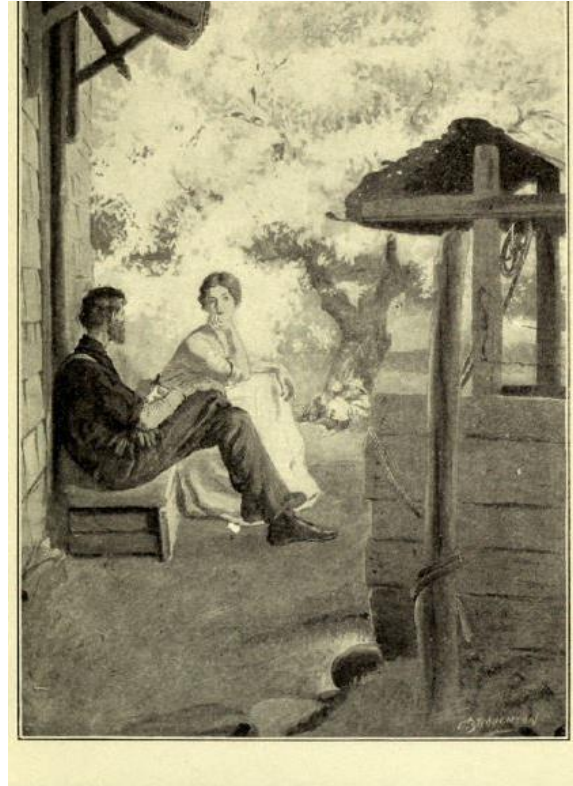
Freeman makes the wife's position on money uncertain; while Adeline's words support Sam's refusal, her crying hints at a deeper discontent with poverty. However, Adeline plays a small role, and Freeman seems to do all she can to deemphasize and belittle Sam's wife. When Freeman first introduces her, she is reading, “peacefully, undisturbed,” a “cheap novel” over the head of a wailing baby (Freeman 175). Later, she holds the baby as it utters “wails of feeble querulousness unheeded” (Freeman 186). Overall, Freeman depicts Adeline as a weak-willed simpleton. Her ability to ignore her crying child does not endear her to readers, nor does her tendency to weep. However, the author does not linger on Adeline; indeed, we learn more about her from the images.

For instance, the final image, which shows Sam and his wife sitting on their doorstep, connects Adeline and nature, a connection that the text does not make. Behind them, dominating the background like a sunset, is the blooming apple tree. Almost pure white and surrounded by shadow and grayness, it seems to glow. Adeline looks directly at us; she too seems to glow slightly, though her paleness is not nearly as blinding as the tree's. Sam is dark and faces away from viewers. Making both central and

making them the brightest elements connects the tree and Adeline. The illustration casts her as a tragic heroine, beset by darkness. Furthermore, there are no children present, which deemphasizes the children's role. The picture asserts the tree's centrality, but only as aesthetically pleasing background. The tree may be important, but the illustrator foregrounds humans.

This depiction differs utterly from how Freeman depicts Sarah Blake's. Sarah Blake, a termagant completely separated from the natural environment, is a particularly troubling character. Freeman writes that the "negative opposition of inanimate things always filled this small, intense woman with fury" (190). Sarah's unnecessary irritation

Figure 10. The Maddoxes and the apple tree



makes her seem unreasonable and unkind; in many ways, she diametrically opposes Sam and his family. We should not be surprised, then, when she reveals that she does not appreciate the natural environment. Freeman most clearly displays Sarah Blake's complete disconnection from the natural world when Sam tries to speak with her about her ailing pear tree. When he suggests that Edison Blake has trimmed too much, she replies, “No, he didn't. I ain't goin' to have old, dead branches or spindlin' ones that don't amount to much on a tree in my yard. I believe in keeping trees nice an' neat as well as houses” (Freeman 198). As Luscher observes, Sarah “views nature as a commodity to be transformed rather than as beauty to be appreciated” (377). Sarah imposes human standards on natural objects, which makes her a villain in a collection that seeks to create a community in which humans and the environment are equal members.

Despite casting Sarah as the antagonist, the images sympathize with her. While the illustrations do not directly support Freeman’s ecofeminist stance, they do offer a more complex characterization. For instance, in the second image, Sarah is alone outside.

Looking

forlornly at

the Maddox

house, she

attempts to

shake a rug.

Her face is

turned away,

Figure 11. Sympathetic Sarah Blake



but her body language suggests her loneliness and pain. The Maddox house is indistinct and shadowy; the apple tree in the corner is even less detailed. The image centers on Sarah, emphasizing humanity and encouraging readers to pity her. She looks so alone and helpless. Her look seems longing, as if she too wishes she could sit and enjoy the day. She seemingly cannot escape her gender or society. She is not at an extreme outside of society, like Martha Elder. She does not have a close connection to a tree, like Sarah Dunn. Unable to connect to nature, Sarah Blake is trapped in her life. The illustrations establish pity for her and remind readers that not everyone is free to escape.

While the other five stories detail specific people's transformations and rebellions, this story is surprisingly static. Instead, we see what a family would look like if they embraced Freeman's ecofeminism. Freeman does not prove that such a philosophy will yield positive results. Despite his profound connection to nature, Sam is not Joseph; Adeline is no Martha. Sarah Blake and Cousin Sarah are twins. Rather than embracing nature as the sole provider, Freeman presses us to understand how nonhuman nature can augment human happiness, despite oppressive gendered social norms. She does not seem to argue that we can exist constructively without gender norms. Instead, we must learn how to expand gender restrictions and incorporate nature so as to improve human lives.

"A Heart of Nature": Conclusion

The Spectator ends its short review by commenting on "The Apple Tree": "But what strange heresy, promulgated, sad to say, by a woman, false to the traditions of her sex, that a family can be happy without a spring cleaning!" ("Six Trees"). The magazine's assessment begins and ends with two important themes: the environment and

gender. Freeman demonstrates how these two issues interconnect; to address one requires exploring the other. Nevertheless, the review tries to dismiss Freeman's nascent ecofeminist argument. The trees, it argues, are irrelevant, and her women are not truly feminine. Perhaps worst, in this review's opinion, is that a female author has promoted such "heresy." However, Freeman does not include the trees lightly, and her stance against spring cleaning is not trivial.

Throughout *Six Trees*, Freeman uncovers how the environment and gender connect. Those who are separated from nature have difficulty changing their views or challenging societal gender expectations. Whether male or female, those who maintain a closer connection to nature often find there a model for rebellion and spiritual enlightenment. This spirituality encourages people to reject anthropocentrism. To thrive, people require a clear and deep connection to nature; cultivating this bond helps people free themselves from society's harmful influences.

Freeman's place as an environmental writer can sometimes be difficult to see because her proto-feminist argument hides behind a human forest. While each story is named after a tree, humans assume center stage. Indeed, in many cases, the trees appear only at the beginning and the end. Furthermore, the illustrations chiefly emphasize humans, sidelining the trees. Where is the environmentalism? Quite simply, Freeman is interested in how people and nature relate. How do people cooperate with nonhuman nature? What do they do there? How can nature help a person? How does it change people? How do male and female relationships with nature differ? Freeman is not

interested in nature divorced from humanity; she wants to examine their complex interactions.

Freeman is not the only author to notice the impact of trees. Henry David Thoreau writes of tramping “eight or ten miles through the deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech-tree, or a yellow-birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines” (312-3). Joseph and Dick both go out of their way to spend time with particular trees. In *The Country of Pointed Firs*, one of Sarah Orne Jewett’s characters greets a tree as if it were an old friend, and remarking, ““Last time I was up this way that tree was kind of drooping and discouraged. Grown trees act that way sometimes, same’s folks...Ash-trees is very likely to have poor spells; they ain’t got the resolution of other trees”” (93). From providing shelter and heat to offering friendship and comfort, trees are central to human life. Freeman’s depictions highlight this relationship and demonstrates how deeply this association impacts people.

Her perspective differs little from those of canonical environmental authors. Male writers from Thoreau to Edward Abbey all explore their affiliation with nature—and how their relationship provides a universal template. Writing over fifty years after Freeman, Wendell Berry examines how people interact with their ancestral land—how they treat it, how they conceive of it, how they protect it. Freeman conducts a similar examination. Berry offers a particularly apt comparison, because Freeman posits a transcendental interaction with nature, but Berry preserves a particularly Christian connection, while Freeman’s more open-ended approach suggests that nature can inspire spiritual enlightenment.

Nature's centrality in *Six Trees* makes Freeman's work strikingly environmental. Her stories always return to how nature influences people. She also examines what happens when people sever themselves from it, giving us pre-transformation Dick, and alienated Sarah Blake. Both can only see nature's material value. Freeman demonstrates that this approach forecloses how humans can appreciate nature's spiritual lessons. Being open to these lessons enables people to embrace change, to free themselves from social constraints, especially gender norms. Freeman expands beyond mere anthropocentrism, but does she not go so far as to posit that nature has rights equal to people's rights. Rather, humans need nature to be better humans. Freeman focuses on them because it is people who should change; nature merely cultivates these transformations.

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